I Guess We'll Have To Join The PTA

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I Guess We'll Have To Join The PTA

by Not_You

Summary

In which the good doctors Lecter-Du Maurier meet with their child's teacher, and agree that they must sleep with him as soon as is decently possible. Which is not soon at all as they hunt their prey through the tall grass of the school year.

Notes

I have been carefully not starting all my other happy, murder-free Hannibal AUs, but this one sat on my chest and would not leave.

Parent-Teacher Conference

It's at the Parent-Teacher conference that they decide to devour Mr. Graham. Neither of them has met him before. They're very busy, and Abigail's reports had all been favorable and her grades good, so there has been no need to meet with him until now. The school looks the same as it ever has during Abigail's three years of attendance, the halls full of bright, happy, autumn-themed art. They're out of place, of course. Other parents are wearing collared shirts with slacks or clean jeans, and calf-length dresses with sweaters. His is one of the only suits in the building, and Bedelia is wearing high heels and pearls.

At least Abigail mostly looks like the other children, in leggings and a tunic top that has 'PRINCESS' on it in pink lettering that matches today's scarf. Abigail's scar is fading rapidly with the swift healing of childhood, but she's still self-conscious about it. Now she skips ahead of them, waving to friends and periodically turning to urge her slow parents to hurry up. Bedelia chuckles, and takes her tiny hand.

“Yes, dear,” she says. Bedelia is endlessly amused to find herself a mother, but in a good-natured, friendly way. Now Abigail returns her smile and tows her off to this year's classroom.

The third-graders are well situated, with views out into the woods beyond the fence. This particular classroom is a bit austere in some ways, without the bright motivational posters and charts in so many others, but there are three class pets. Abigail had come running home on the first day, breathless with excitement because there was a snake and a rat and a bird, and that meant that Mr. Graham was the best teacher ever. The snake's name is Ishtar, the bird (a bright blue budgie) is Sky, and the rat is named Algernon, which Hannibal finds adorably twisted. Bedelia hisses softly to Ishtar, who flickers her tongue at her in return while Abigail giggles.

“Mama, you're silly.”

“Yes, dear,” she says, straightening up again. “I am silly. Hannibal?”

He returns from checking the list of times, taking his wife's hand as his daughter goes to say hello to Algernon, who puts his handlike little paws up on the glass, watching her.

“Our turn is in five minutes,” Hannibal says, and Bedelia smiles.

“Are you curious to meet the Beastmaster?” she asks, and he chuckles.

“Of course. Not many people are so understanding of our little Abigail.”

Abigail has moved on to whistle at Sky, who whistles back, sidling along her perch to cock her head and look at Abigail, who giggles. Looking at her now, it's hard to picture her the way she once was, screaming and crying at the slightest provocation, and viciously attacking the many people who frightened her, mostly men. It has been a great relief to see her doing so well with a male teacher.

“I must confess to being very curious,” Bedelia says, and Hannibal smiles, raising their joined hands so that he can lightly kiss her knuckles..

“And I, mio caro.”

With the conferences also serving as an open house, the actual conversations are happening in computer labs and disparate corners of the library. Fortunately, Mr. Graham's room is right beside the library, and after Abigail has checked in with her animal friends and another human one, they go to take their positions at a big table by the potted plants, where there are large sheets of butcher paper to color on, a bin of crayons, and a watchful librarian to keep the mayhem to a minimum while parents are closeted with teachers in the study carrels on the other side of the library. Abigail draws cats and spaceships while they wait, and just hugs Bedelia and lets go when she must, like a well-attached child trusting its caregivers to return. Which they will. Hannibal feels an almost painful surge of affection for his daughter, and takes his wife's hand.

There are three teachers stationed in the area to which they are directed, but two of them are women, so Hannibal knows instantly that Mr. Graham is the shabby young man tucked into the corner, eyes like the ocean gazing out from behind clunky glasses that only make the semi-feral loveliness of his stubbly face all the more obvious. Abigail has giggled about the principal wanting Mr. Graham to be neat, and shave properly or grow a real beard. Hannibal is proud of his little girl. At eight years old she knows that the entire debate is moot in the face of the principal's ludicrous soul patch.

“Drs. Lecter-Du Maurier?” he says, selecting a particular manila folder from the pile on the desk.

“Yes,” Hannibal says, waiting for Bedelia to seat herself in one of the little plastic chairs before doing the same. “Good evening, Mr. Graham.”

“And to you,” he says, with that that faintly baffled look most Americans under forty give them. It suits him, and Hannibal wonders if the stubble is genuine carelessness or cultivation. He wants to rub his face against it, either way. Bedelia catches his eye as Mr. Graham opens the folder, and gives him the little smile that lets him know that she knows every thought currently in his head. He returns it, and squeezes her hand.

Mr. Graham looks up, and gives them both a small, genuine smile. “I'm pleased to report that Abigail has been doing very well this year. The behavioral problems noted in her file are almost gone, she's kind to the other kids and the animals, and you know that she's running an A/B average on assignments so far.”

“All very gratifying,” Hannibal says as he studies Mr. Graham's face, because it is.

By the time they've finished talking over Abigail's promising start to this year, Hannibal knows that he and Bedelia are in complete agreement. Now isn't the time to say anything to each other, and they don't need to. They shake hands with their prey and leave to collect Abigail.

The Graham Question

Bedelia likes the routine of putting Abigail to bed for the night. She and Hannibal alternate, and there are some cosmetic differences of routine, but both of them help her get her hair into two braids so brushing it in the morning won't be complete torture, make sure her teeth are brushed and her face is washed, and then tuck her in and read her a story. Tonight it's Runaway Bunny, and Bedelia assures Abigail that she would work just as hard as the mother bunny to get her back again if she ran away.

“You're my precious girl,” she says softly, kissing Abigail's forehead. “I'll do whatever I have to to keep you safe.”

Abigail smiles, snuggling down with her stuffed rabbit as Bedelia carefully closes her door. She yawns, sees that it's half-past nine, and wonders when she became so suburban.

“Darling?” Hannibal murmurs, and Bedelia smiles, catching him as he rounds the corner and kissing him.

“Yes?” she whispers against his jaw, and he sighs, nuzzling her cheek. His stubble is starting to come in, and she rubs against it, remembering Mr. Graham.

“Do we have time to talk?” Hannibal asks, and Bedelia chuckles.

“I am not so old, my love,” she says.

Their favorite way to talk when it's late and they're tired anyway is to open a half bottle of a good red and curl up in bed together, propped up on all the pillows and being very careful not to drip wine on the sheets. They do so now, and Bedelia rests her head on Hannibal's shoulder, trailing her fingertips through his chest hair in an old and soothing pattern.

“So you know that I long to do the indecent thing and seduce our child's teacher.”

“As do I,” she assures him, taking a sip of her wine. “He is adorable, but of course Abigail is our first priority.”

“Oh, indeed,” Hannibal says. “I couldn't justify any kind of positive move until summer vacation.”

“And if he's straight?” Bedelia murmurs.

“Naturally, I will concede the field to you, aiding and abetting your efforts. I would also like to watch, of course.”

“Of course.” She chuckles, since her sex drive has always been the lower one, and she has spent many happy hours sitting with a glass of wine and watching Hannibal shatter some attractive man. There has been less of that since adopting Abigail, of course, and she's sure that it forms part of their immediate attraction to Mr. Graham.

“We should be more involved with Abigail's school, anyway.”

“Justify it however you like,” Bedelia coos, kissing his neck.

“Mm. There's a bake sale coming up.”

“Then you know what to do, dearest,” she says, draining her glass and setting it aside. “I leave it entirely to you.” He's tenting the sheets a little, her darling, insatiable monster, and after she has resumed her previous comfortable position, she slides her hand down his belly, finding and gripping him. He lets out a pleased growl, and she smiles, stroking him slowly and firmly as the sound rumbles against her ear. “I hope you will forgive me, should I fall asleep during this hand job.”

“I will, darling,” he purrs, and melts back into the pillows, hips rocking just a little into her hand. Bedelia is almost asleep by the time he comes, but then again, so is he. Her dear, fastidious Hannibal can barely muster the energy to swab them both off with tissues rather than a real towel or even wet wipes. They'll be sticky and musty in the morning, but that's all right.

Hannibal no longer takes appointments before half-past ten, giving him plenty of time to get Abigail ready for school single-handed. So when Bedelia wakes up late and in need of a shower, she only has herself to worry about. While she scrambles to put herself together, Hannibal is making a smiley-face frittata for Abigail, who is carefully braiding her hair, still in her UFO pajamas. Bedelia kisses the top of Abigail's head as she goes by in a bra and a half-slip, wondering where on earth she left the earrings that go with today's shoes.

At times like this it's easy to resent Hannibal his leisure, but he'll still be in the office when Bedelia is done for the day. She takes nothing after two in the afternoon so that she can be there for Abigail, and that means that she gets a solid two hours of sipping wine and helping Abigail with her homework before she even needs to put dinner into the oven. Hannibal almost always prepares dinner in advance, and there's often an after-school snack tucked up next to it. By the time Bedelia finds her earrings, Abigail is mostly done with breakfast. Hannibal hands Bedelia a travel mug of coffee and a paper bag, kissing her cheek and telling her to take care, as he does every day.

Abigail just waves and yells, “See you later, Mom!”

It's always nice to see Abigail feeling secure, and Bedelia is smiling as she leaves. The bag turns out to contain a pita pocket of bacon, cheese, lettuce, and spinach. No condiments or tomato, so she can actually eat it in the car and emerge at the office still presentable. Bedelia has always been grateful to be married to a man who understands things.

When Bedelia and Hannibal had agreed to split the day, Bedelia had only taken the morning half because she had had to agree that it helped keep her from starting too early. Bedelia has decided that she isn't actually an alcoholic because the adjustment had been easy, but it's good to maintain healthy habits. Only having room for one appointment after lunch is still a little strange, but in a good way. She bids a fond farewell to the receptionists and makes her way to the school, wondering what Abigail will have to tell her today.

An Afternoon With Will

Will ends most days with what is known as SSR, for Silent, Sustained Reading or Shut up, Sit down, and Read, depending on whether you ask the teaching journals or the kids. Either way, he finds that it's uninvolved enough for tired kids to do it without getting cranky, and soothing enough to keep the excited ones from getting too worked up before the bell. Today has been a good one, and everyone is fairly calm. The reluctant readers are reading, one of the voracious readers is drawing but has a plausible deniability book open so Will doesn't have to bother her, and now that there's some stuff he can read on his own, Billy the mainstreaming kid is happy, too. Will sometimes uses this time to correct things, but today he sits on his desk and skims Watership Down in between keeping an eye on the room. Will hasn't got true eyes in the back of his head, but he's getting better.

The bell releases them all, and Will reminds everyone of the math test next week, raising his voice to be heard over the chaotic exodus. There are a few stragglers, and he helps one to find his math book and another to find her lunch box, finally emerging from the coatroom to find Abigail watching Ishtar. Her parents usually pick her up, so he lets her be rather than trying to get out her out in time to catch the bus.

“Your mom coming to get you?” he asks, going back to his desk.

“Yeah,” Abigail says, “but not for a little while.”

“Okay, I'll just be correcting those spelling tests.”

Will hates spelling tests, and keeps them to ten questions apiece, making each question ten percent and letter grades really easy to calculate. Now he whips through them, writing the correct spellings of any missed words next to their counterparts, and the letter grade in red pen. He doesn't believe in happy stickers for the smallest achievements or stars on every correct answer. He can't actually hand the damn things back until he gets them into the spreadsheet, but hopefully he'll be doing that at home, with two fingers of whiskey at his elbow and a dog at his feet.

Abigail is so quiet that he forgets she's there until a soft whistle reminds him of her presence. He looks up as Sky whistles back to her, and smiles even as he wonders if she's late. As if summoned by his thoughts, her mother comes in a moment later.

Even if Abigail wasn't so forthright about the Lecter-Du Mauriers not being her biological parents, it would be pretty obvious. She's a pretty child, but in an ordinary kind of way. Her mother is radiant, and so put-together that it's a little ridiculous. Today her earrings match the detailing on her high-heeled shoes, and she looks like a visitor from another world against the schoolroom backdrop of cinder block walls and industrial carpeting.

“Abigail,” Will says, "have I been aiding and abetting?”

“Maybe a little, Mr. Graham,” she says, picking up her bag and going to her mother. “Sorry, Mom.”

“You only need to leave a minute or so earlier in future, dear,” she says.

Will chuckles. “I'll help to keep track of it,” he says, and Dr. Lecter-Du Maurier smiles.

“Thank you,” she says, and takes Abigail's hand. “Come along, darling.” She's like some kind of parody of a loving mother, but Will can tell that her affection for her child is completely genuine. He has a lot of chances to judge, in his line of work, and it's always a relief when parents seem to actually give a shit. As he packs up the critters, he reminds himself to call his dad.

Will could probably leave Sky, Ishtar, and Algernon overnight without any real ill effects, but it seems uncaring, especially since he does a lot of work from home and is usually gone by four. It's not so very difficult. They would each have a spare cage for cleaning day anyway, so it's just a matter of sticking them into tiny travel cages for the drive home. All of them are used to their commute and to the dogs at the end of it, even if Will never meant to keep any of these creatures, two pet shop refugees and one indefinite foster from a vanished neighbor. Still, the dogs have gotten used to them and they've gotten used to the dogs. Will is pretty sure that Sky is just resigned to being part of a flock of big hairy things that can't fly, and Algernon uses his ball to terrorize the dogs, all of whom find it awful and uncanny. Ishtar, being a reptile, doesn't care about much beyond warmth and the regular delivery of mouse pinks.

The dogs are delighted to see them, of course, and Will laughs as he carries everything and everyone inside, petting dogs whenever he has a hand free. As soon as the small animals are installed inside, he takes the dogs out to pee and to sniff around the underbrush. Beverly comes out here on her lunch break to give them a walk and some hope, and in return Will does all of her home repairs. Today there's a note on the counter that Pavlov is favoring his left forepaw but of course won't let anyone but Will touch his feet.

Will clicks disapprovingly. “Pavlov,” he says, and the dog slinks forward with his usual guilty look. Will snorts, and scratches him behind the ears. “Come on, you ridiculous animal,” he says, and Pavlov slinks after him, squinching his eyes shut in mortal fear as Will takes his paw and raises the Nail-Clippers Of Terror.

It only takes Will a moment to snip off the overgrown toenail that's causing the trouble. “There,” he says, “you lived.” He gives Pavlov a biscuit for being brave and a tiny piece of one to each of the others for being supportive, and then settles down to a frozen dinner and a pile of cocksucking spelling tests.

Early Morning

Sometimes Dad takes appointments that are a little earlier than usual, and he has today. Abigail doesn't mind. It's kind of cool to be at school before the buses arrive, when there's almost nobody here. She's really supposed to sit in the multipurpose room with the kids whose parents drop them off on their way to jobs that start before school does, but Dad has agreed to ask Mr. Graham if she can just hang out in the classroom before they get started. It's not like Abigail can't sit still and be quiet.

The door is closed but the light is on, and Dad knocks gently. “Come in!” Mr. Graham calls, and they walk in to find him sitting at his desk with his glasses pushed up to rest just at the start of his messy hair. It looks like he tried to shave today, but as usual didn't get it right. Abigail is glad that this hasn't prejudiced Mom and Dad against him, since they tend to prefer for people to be neat.

Abigail waves. “Hi!”

“I have to be at the office a bit earlier than usual,” Dad says, “and Abigail prefers this to the multipurpose room. May she stay?”

“I don't see why not,” Mr. Graham says, and as he's talking Algernon pokes his head out of his jacket pocket, looking around and wiggling his little pink nose. Abigail laughs and Dad does too. Mr. Graham smiles sheepishly, scooping Algernon up. “We like to have a little quality time in the morning,” he says, and Dad smiles.

“I can relate, Mr. Graham.”

“Can I hold Algernon?”

“May you,” Dad says, and Abigail rolls her eyes.

“May I?”

“Yeah,” Mr. Graham says, “he likes people.”

Abigail sets her bag down and comes to the desk, where Mr. Graham carefully passes Algernon to her. He's little, warm, and alive; his heartbeat almost a hum as he climbs over her hands and forearms, making her giggle. “Thanks, Mr. Graham.”

“You're welcome.”

“My time is short,” Dad says, because he talks like that, “but I would like to reconfirm: the bake sale is on Wednesday, yes?”

“Yes,” Mr. Graham says, “it is. Are you the one who packs Abigail those pretty lunches?”

Dad smiles. “I do my best.”

Dad does do his best, and today she has her bento, which is always extra cute. He talks to Mr. Graham for a bit longer while Abigail plays with Algernon, and then kisses the top of her head and leaves for the office. Abigail is sort of proud of herself for not being so clingy anymore. Dad will come back. He's calm, not like her birth dad. Algernon is calm, too, and Abigail is so fascinated with him that the time passes quickly. All too soon Mr. Graham is putting Algernon back in his cage and making Abigail wash her hands in case Algernon has rat germs. He looks pretty healthy to Abigail, but she's willing to go along to get along.

The other kids start streaming in. It sucks that Abigail and Cindy can't be in the same class again this year, but Kara is nice, and Brooke is funny and Billy really is a nice kid. Abigail was a little leery of him at first because there had been a mainstreaming kid back in kindergarten who was a real jerk and always got away with it, but Billy is sweet. He won't be here until after lunch, though. He spends his mornings with Mrs. Peppers down at the Special Ed classroom, doing things that are easier for him then the Current Events and the history lesson that goes with them. He also has a hard time making posters, which Mr. Graham has them do for a lot of the science stuff.

Today Abigail's Current Event is about a guy in Cameroon who's using a cell phone service to help ladies have babies safely. Abigail likes to find things that are good, since so much of the news is about bad things. Today they talk about why Syria is having a war, and it's sad and kind of scary and makes Abigail glad that she doesn't go to church. She doesn't really like history, because as far as she can tell it's just a bunch of people fighting over stupid stuff. She's pretty sure Mr. Graham feels the same, and that's why he gets it out of the way first thing.

After History is English, which is pretty easy. They correct sentences and each write a paragraph about whatever they want so Mr. Graham can read them and see if they're making any mistakes. Abigail writes about how she wants to get a pet, and that now her parents think she might be old enough to remember to do her share of taking care of it. After they turn in the paragraphs they get their spelling tests back. Abigail kind of misses Ms. Neilson's rainbow stickers from last year, but whatever, what really matters is that she didn't get any wrong this week.

At first recess her scarf nearly comes off and that's terrible, but Brooke grabs the end for her and winds it back on before it can finish falling off. Only Cindy knows exactly why Abigail cares so much, but today she at least lets Brooke and Kara in on the existence of her scar. This leads to a comparison of less emotional ones, like the dead white patch on Kara's leg from falling off her bike last year, and the one where the doctors took Brooke's appendix out when she was a really little kid. Billy joins them because he had a heart operation, and all of them are duly impressed. He says he was only a baby and doesn't remember at all.

“My mom says there's a hole in your heart that closes when you're born,” Cindy says. Her mom is a baby doctor, and ought to know. “It's supposed to close up, and when it doesn't they have to go in and fix it.”

Billy just shrugs, and Abigail makes a mental note to ask Dad about that later, since Dad used to go in and fix people.

Aliens In Suburbia

Hannibal has had a long and trying day, and it does his heart good to come home to the scent of cottage pie and the sight of his daughter drawing a large picture of ducks and spaceships. It has a pleasing, Ray Bradbury sort of look to it, and she bounces up to come over and hug him as Bedelia comes drifting in from the kitchen to kiss him in greeting.

“Dinner is nearly ready,” she says. “I slaved over it, I'll have you know.”

Hannibal chuckles, and goes to shower, returning to find Abigail setting the table while Bedelia assembles the salad, ingredients left clean and dry and ready for her. Hannibal sometimes misses the kind of truly complicated things he used to make, but he has so much less time, and while Abigail has a mature palate for her age, she's still only eight years old. Over the meal he listens to Abigail's report of her day, complaints about long it's taking the other kids to comprehend long division, and questions about the fetal heart. It's always nice to explain something to an attentive child, and Hannibal extends his answer into a short anatomy lesson that carries them through to the end of dessert. Children need healthy food, but depriving them of all sweets seems positively barbaric to Hannibal. He generally compromises with a lot of fruit, and tonight is a strawberry mousse that Abigail has always loved, since it's pink, pretty, and delicious.

“Dad,” Abigail says as they're clearing the dishes away, “you need to call Ms. Katz so it's not like last year again.” It takes him a moment to parse this, and she sighs. “The bake sale!”

“Oh, right,” he says.

There are usually a few sales during the year, but the first one is almost always run by Ms. Katz, since it's centered around the first of the first game of the season for the girls' soccer team and the proceeds go to the orchestra, both of which she runs, as coach and music teacher. It's a drop-in donation sale, accepting whatever comes in, but Hannibal does not want to repeat last year, when he made the exact same cake as another parent and then outsold them so brutally that Bedelia had had to buy the entire thing to soothe his victim.

Ms. Katz answers after a few rings, and laughs at Hannibal's question. “So far I've been promised lemon, black forest, and pound cake. And Mrs. Henderson usually brings angel food at the last minute, but we'll see.”

Hannibal thanks her and hangs up, free to make the apple spice cake that the season seems to require, along with five dozen cinnamon-sugar cookies. While they bake he arranges his decorating supplies and mixes royal icing, because presentation is so important. He won't be able to be there for the setup, but he knows that he can trust Bedelia to make their portion of the table attractive.

Apple cake is too homely for much decoration, so Hannibal merely gives it an artful drizzle of white icing and leaves it at that. The perfectly flat, pale-brown cookies, on the other hand, offer an excellent canvas, and he pipes an autumn leaf or two onto each one. Abigail helps

him to mix the colors, now that her math assignment is done, and she marvels at Hannibal's patience and skill.

He just chuckles. “That, my dear girl,” he says, carefully adding brown veins to a red leaf, “is one of the major benefits of being old.”

After he finishes the cookies for the sale, he helps Abigail to decorate the last dozen for their personal use, with cat faces, flowers, and embellished letters and numbers. They finish in plenty of time to pull Bedelia away from her laptop to join them on the couch for milk, cookies, and yet another viewing of 'How To Train Your Dragon,' which is still Abigail's favorite movie. Hannibal is becoming more and more sure that they're going to have to cave in and at least get a turtle or something if not a cat. Bedelia puts Abigail to bed as Hannibal finishes the very last of the dishes, and they meet in their bedroom afterward, snuggling down under the covers together. Hannibal thinks of his neatly packed baked goods and chuckles.

“Mio caro,” he says, “would you have ever thought when we met that someday we would be putting our daughter to bed by half-past nine, and participating in bake sales?”

Bedelia smiles, nuzzling into the side of his neck. “Well,” she says, “perhaps. You did make the finest hashish brownies in town.”

He chuckles. “If you want me to, I'll see if I can find the supplies to make a batch while Abigail is at camp.”

Bedelia giggles, and they talk quietly about old times, lulling themselves to sleep.

The morning dawns clear and bright and very promising for outdoor pursuits. Hannibal rolls out of bed and starts cooking breakfast. Fortunately, today Bedelia wakes up in time to eat with Abigail, and Hannibal can remind her that they do have pretty cellophane bags to use for their orders.

She smiles at him. “You can trust me, beloved. I will be a credit to your baking.”

Abigail giggles, and Hannibal lightly tugs her single braid, telling her to finish her egg. He is entirely too responsible to actually rush his child in hopes of being early enough to ogle her teacher, but he can't claim that the thought doesn't cross his mind. As it is, he and Abigail arrive in advance of the bell, and Hannibal walks her to the door. Every day he wonders if this will be the day she decides that she's too old to be escorted so far, but it hasn't happened yet.

Mr. Graham smiles at them from where he's standing beside Sky's cage, the little bird devouring fresh seeds. “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” Hannibal replies, and does his best not to be obvious about memorizing every line of Mr. Graham's beautiful hands.

Bake Sale

Cindy is on the soccer team, so of course Abigail wants to cheer on her friend, and they have to be there early to help set everything up, rather than taking Bedelia's preferred approach to school sporting events, which is to show up late with some wine in a juice bottle. She carries a basket of cake, cookies, and packaging in Abigail's wake, her daughter running ahead to find Cindy and talk to her while she warms up. Bedelia just sighs and hauls the basket over to the sale tables. Once the coordinator directs her to an empty space, Bedelia occupies herself with arranging everything as attractively as possible. The cake server is real silver, a dangerous habit that Hannibal absolutely refuses to give up. Bedelia supposes that if they lose this one, they do have her mother's.

Bedelia is deeply involved in her task when a quiet male voice excuses itself, making her look up and then smile at Mr. Graham. “I wasn't expecting to see you here,” she says, watching as he sets down a pair of tongs and a plastic bin of strange, lumpy things that are so hideously ugly that they come back around to being appealing again.

“Beverly Katz is a friend of mine. I try to be supportive.” He glances over with a shy little smile at Bedelia's stock. “Maybe the contrast will help sales.”

“Hannibal would say that anything made with love is good, Mr. Graham,” she says. “Though I must admit that I cannot tell what you have made.”

“I call 'em mudballs,” Will says, “and they taste better than they look.”

Bedelia smiles. “Please,” she says, “let me be your first customer.”

The system is actually cafeteria-style, with a few dutiful orchestra moms taking it in shifts to manage the cash box, counting everything and collecting seventy-five cents per cookie and a dollar for pretty much everything else, but Bedelia just hands Will three quarters, reasonably sure that he can be trusted not to embezzle from a bake sale. He uses the tongs to put one of the lumps onto a paper napkin, and passes it to her.

Bedelia thanks him, and nibbles curiously on the edge. As expected, chocolate is involved, but also oats and coconut. It's chewy and satisfying, and probably isn't even that bad for her. “I like it,” she tells him, after half of it has disappeared.

He chuckles. “They're hideous, but they actually taste good while being coincidentally vegan and gluten-free.”

“I think Hannibal would faint if I suggested to him that cookies could be made without butter,” Bedelia says, and gets to work on the second half as Mr. Graham gives her the incredibly simple recipe.

By the time he finishes, Abigail has come running back to join them, because it's close enough to game time that Cindy needs to listen to Ms. Katz's pre-game talk. She chirps a happy greeting to both of them and buys a mudball, eating is as she tells Mr. Graham how

much he needs to try her dad's cookies, and about decorating the ones they kept for themselves. He listens patiently, and obediently buys one of the cookies, taking a moment to admire the leaves before eating it in a slow, cautious way that makes her think of a dog with a new food.

Bedelia smiles. “Well?” she says, after he has actually swallowed his first bite.

“Delicious,” he says, and Abigail laughs.

“I think Dad would take it as a challenge if you said anything else,” she says, and Bedelia chuckles.

“I know he would,” she says, and Abigail giggles, barely able to stand still long enough for Bedelia to redo the frizzled end of her braid before running off to cheer for Cindy as the game begins.

“She's a good kid,” Mr. Graham says softly.

“Thank you.”

“Surprisingly well-adjusted,” he says, and Bedelia wonders if something stupid about Abigail's trauma is going to come out of his mouth and make him a great deal less attractive, “with a pair of psychiatrists for parents,” he continues, with a sidelong little smile that makes her laugh.

“We do the best we can,” she says. “I think it helps that Hannibal has a good deal of childish mischief in his nature.”

“I wouldn't have expected that,” he says, and Bedelia is very pleased to see his mouth stretching in a thoughtful smile. He looks like he's doing his best to picture it, and the expression of affectionate amusement on his face is delightful to behold.

“I wouldn't have expected you to be particular friends with Ms. Katz.”

He chuckles wryly. “I wouldn't have either. I was the new guy a few years ago, and she really went out of her way to welcome me.”

Bedelia wonders if there's history there. Not that his being hung up on another person necessarily precludes a few enjoyable evenings with her and with Hannibal, but it certainly might slow things up. She ponders this as the game goes on and Mr Graham tells her a few things about himself. Apparently in addition to the class pets there is a collection of dogs at home, and she is charmed by Will's dedication to his creatures, his awareness of their individual personalities and needs. She's also a little alarmed at the size of the menagerie, but Will seems well able to look after them.

“I used to bring Winston with me,” he says, “but there's too many people with dog allergies for it to really be safe, so I had to stop. It's too bad, he's great at events.”

Sure enough, a lot of their customers ask Mr. Graham about his dog, and several offer their best wishes for the entire menagerie. Will is reasonably gracious to all of them, but Bedelia

can tell that even this light customer service is a bit much for him. He avoids eye contact and there's a pained tone to some of his pleasantries that reminds Bedelia of Hannibal, when he's trapped at a party with particularly banal and/or rude people.

“I have to ask,” she says, during a lull in their trade, “but you don't seem to enjoy dealing with people.”

“Kids aren't people yet,” Will says. “They've got a lower load of bullshit.” He coughs delicately, and Bedelia laughs.

“I'll pardon your English, Mr. Graham,” she says, and he chuckles, running a hand through his obnoxiously touchable hair.

“Might as well call me Will,” he says, “if you're pardoning my sins.”

Bedelia smiles. “I don't think I'm actually qualified, Will,” she tells him, “but you're welcome.”

Bake Sale II

Will has the weird sense that Bedelia, as she says he must call her now, is flirting with him. In a gentle, reserved kind of way that's almost not there at all. It probably isn't there at all. She's at least a decade older than him, poised, gorgeous, and apparently very happily married. She has no reason to hit on her kid's twitchy little teacher as they operate adjacent bake sale tables. No one has a reason to do that, and Will has to assume that she's just being friendly and that he's reading too much into it. After all, he is teaching her child, who has a traumatic history and can use every bit of understanding and support that she can get.

At least the kid is resilient, and Will definitely feels warm and fuzzy to see her beaming little face as she comes running up during half-time to report the score and to buy a brownie to share with her mother, who somehow manages to make the divide without getting crumbs everywhere.

“Pretty good,” Abigail says, looking thoughtful as she chews, “but Dad's are better.”

Bedelia laughs. “I'm sure he'll be very happy to hear that.”

Abigail runs away again as the game resumes. Will has sold most of the mudballs, and won't be disappointed at all if it stops here and he's left with some of his own. Bedelia has a sudden rush of business in the form of a woman with four small children, each of whom wants some cake. The slices are very neat, and transfer and divide well, since a whole piece is way too much for anyone under ten or so. Again, Will sees Bedelia as a cutout from another reality. It's so strange to see her patiently listening to a three-year-old's description of her pet lizards when her ensemble for an elementary school ballgame and bake sale involves what look like real sapphires and a pair of slacks with a crease that could probably slice bread, to say nothing of her elaborate and careful hair.

Will is just studying that hair in the sunlight, trying to figure out if blonde was Bedelia's natural color before she started tinting her grey, when a shadow falls across him, making him jump. The other Dr. Lecter-Du Maurier chuckles, smiling down at him.

“I didn't mean to startle you,” he says. “I must confess, I'm a little surprised to see you here.”

“Beverly Katz is my friend,” Will says, shrugging. “You want a mudball?”

“I would have to be more certain of its composition to truly desire one,” he says, and Will wonders for umpteenth time who the fuck talks like that.

“Bedelia said that you might have some philosophical objections to the lack of butter,” he says, and Dr. Lecter-Du Maurier laughs.

“I might, but I'm certainly pleased to see that my wife has dragged you onto a first-name basis. May we be the same?”

“Of course,” Will says. “It'd be rude of me to do otherwise.” He offers his hand. “Will.”

“Hannibal,” Hannibal says, taking it for just a moment, his hand dry, cool, and strong.

Will feels it for a long time after he lets go, but of course has the sense not to show it. Luckily for him, a fifth-grader he taught two years ago comes up to buy a mudball and catch up a bit. Will can't claim to remember all of his students, but bright red hair stands out, as do female math geeks. She thanks him for her mudball and then goes scampering off to the cash box to deposit her seventy-five cents toward keeping the orchestra in rosin. He glances up at Hannibal to see a fond little smile on his lips that makes Will hope that he's not blushing and feel like an idiot. He clearly needs to get laid if he's getting flustered over a couple of parents at a goddamn school event.

“I'm glad Abigail is in your class,” Hannibal says, and Will shrugs.

“I do my best.”

“Dad, are you finally here?” Abigail calls, running up to the table. “Come watch the end of the game, it's close!'

He takes her hand and lets her tow him away, his suit looking ridiculous in the afternoon sun. The game only lasts another ten minutes or so, and the cheering from the mostly home crowd lets Will know that they've won. He chuckles, knowing that Beverly will be just as pleased as the kids.

In the general exodus from the stands, he and Bedelia sell out almost immediately, to hungry kids and parents who are perfectly willing to place a cookie or some apple spice cake between now and dinner. The wrench of selling the last mudball is softened by the happy way his little customer devours it, and as he tucks the tongs into the plastic bin and pockets the remaining napkins, he decides as he always does that sitting in the sun and dealing with people has been completely worth it.

Abigail and Hannibal come ambling over after most of the crowd has dispersed, Hannibal listening to a recitation of the game's highlights, which turns into pleading to be allowed to tag along to the team's pizza party, which Cindy has invited her to do.

“You know how I feel about bad food, Abigail,” he says, “but I suppose that occasional exposure is inevitable.”

“Most kids don't like artichoke hearts and smoked mozzarella, Dad,” she says, rolling her eyes a little.

“I'm willing to attend,” Bedelia says, and Abigail comes around the table to hug her in gratitude. “What about you, Will?”

“I'll eat bad food,” he says, gathering his things and standing, “but I prefer to do it at home.” Also, going straight home lets him set up the Graham-Katz Post-Game Celebration, which consists of a pitcher of Harvey Wallbangers and any R-rated movie that isn't a total downer. It's an important ritual.

“You're no fun, Mr. Graham,” Abigail informs him, and makes everyone laugh. Will most of all, because it's sort of true.

Pizza Party

The thing about bad food is that it kinda reminds Abigail of Before, when her birth parents were alive and her birth dad wasn't crazy and everything was okay. Everything is pretty okay now, but it's been a lot of hard work, and Abigail does still miss Before. Just a little. It makes her feel guilty even though Mom and Dad would tell her that it's perfectly normal to miss her first Mom and Dad, and that they don't mind. She tells herself that very firmly, and sits at Cindy's table, where they agree to get a supreme, which Abigail hates, and a pepperoni, which is her favorite.

It balances out pretty well, and Abigail can take two slices of pepperoni, all puffy and under-backed, with the cornmeal on the bottom. Nothing like Dad makes, and everything like what her first dad would buy for her when she insisted. Her first set of parents had been big on nutrition too, but they had also been a little more normal. Well, except for her first dad being crazy. Even now, in the bright, sunny pizza place and with the happy team around her, she shivers. Mom looks down at her, and squeezes her hand under the table. Mom and Dad always know when she's remembering, and she squeezes back to let Mom know she's okay.

Cindy is good like that too, and shows Abigail a cool way to fold straw wrappers, and another girl reads her palm. Abigail is pretty sure she's making it up, but it's fun. Ms. Katz doesn't talk forever like some coaches do. She just congratulates them on doing a good job and tells them to enjoy their pizza. She's cool that way, and she spends a little time at different tables before disappearing for a while.

Just when Abigail is starting to wonder where she is and even get a little nervous, something that hardly ever happens anymore, she comes back with an ice cream cup for each of them. They're technically outside food and drink, but when one of the girls asks, Beverly says that they were willing to let her use a little freezer space for an hour after she had ordered so much pizza. There are only two kinds, plain chocolate or half vanilla, half orange. Abigail takes a half and half one, and when there are enough for the grownups to have some too, Mom even takes a chocolate one and nibbles on it slowly, even though she likes the really good chocolate, that costs extra and sometimes has weird stuff in it like chilies or salt.

After everyone picks up all their straw wrappers and napkins and everything they actually want to keep, like backpacks and leftovers, they can all walk out into the night, which is really starting to get cold. Abigail shivers and hugs herself and then hugs Cindy goodbye as she walks off with her mom and her baby brother. Mom takes her hand and walks her to the car as Ms. Katz answers a phone call, laughing and telling someone that she'll be there, don't worry. Abigail smiles, and sighs when she gets into Mom's car, because the seats are heated. Mom smiles, and waits for Abigail to buckle her seat belt before they pull out of the parking lot. Mom switches on the CD player so they can listen to Taylor Swift. Dad says that her music causes him actual physical pain, but Mom just says she likes some of the lyrics. She doesn't like 'Blank Space,' though.

When they get home the house is full of weird, spooky not-music, because Dad is playing his theremin. It's yet another way that he's totally weird, but it's a fun weird. There's a rhythm to

the spooky noises, a slow rise and fall that makes her think of the wind at night. Mom kisses the top of Abigail's head and wanders off to change into a house dress. Dad always laughs at them, but Abigail thinks that they're elegant in their own way. They're nice colors and patterns and they drape beautifully and kind of float. And they have pockets.

Abigail goes and finds Dad in his study. He keeps the harpsichord in the living room so he can play it for people, but he's not as sociable with the theremin. Of course, he doesn't mind Abigail being there, and smiles when she pokes her head into the room.

“There you are,” he says.

“Can I help you compose?”

He doesn't correct her for once, just gestures for her to join him. She already knows about how you don't actually touch a theremin, that it makes noise because the antennae know where your hands are and turn that into signals. Dad sits on a bench to play it, and he moves over so that there's room for Abigail. She carefully brings her hands up into the playing space, giggling at the funny noise it makes. After that she's still, though, and when she moves again she tries to move her hands like waves, or gliding birds.

Abigail likes the music she makes, but it's tuneless and all kinda the same, and after a while she stops and just leans on Dad.

He puts his arm around her. “You smell like chemical additives,” he tells her. “Did you have a good time?”

Abigail grins up at him. “Yeah. Ms. Katz gave everybody ice cream.”

“I'm glad you enjoyed it,” he says, and she laughs.

“You would have hated it, but Mom did eat one.”

“Will wonders never cease,” Dad murmurs, and Abigail laughs again. They play with the theremin for a bit more, and then put it away and go looking for Mom, who is sitting at the kitchen table with a bottle of wine and a bar of expensive chocolate. She smiles when she sees them, and breaks the bar up to share.

A Healthy Dinner After The Bake Sale

With Abigail's dinner having been so vile, Hannibal of course makes her a healthy snack before bed, fanning slices of fruit and cheese out on a plate along with some of the rosemary crackers they all enjoy so much. He adds a sprig of the fresh herb for decoration, and Abigail thanks him for making the plate pretty. One of the first things they had ever shared had been breakfast, the smiley-face frittata that he still makes for her. She had smiled back at that first one, in the time when he and Bedelia were still counting each smile, treasuring each sign of life going on for their daughter. It's lovely to see that lost little ghost of a child three years older and stronger and more assured.

After she eats, Abigail brushes her teeth and gets ready for bed, while Hannibal peruses her bookshelf. He's more autocratic than Bedelia, and he will *not* read Hamster Huey And The Gooey Kablooie, nor will he do the Happy Hamster Hop. Bedelia will, though it requires an extra glass of wine. Hannibal prevents these indignities by choosing three books and having Abigail take her choice..

Tonight the selection is Stellaluna, of which Hannibal is very fond. He likes to think that he and Bedelia have been more adaptive than the heroine's bird foster family, but it's always good to validate the way that Abigail sometimes feels like another species. She's tired tonight, and by the time the book is finished her eyes are closed. He smiles, and kisses her head, tucking the blankets in around her and turning off everything but the nightlight, glowing soft orange by the door.

Hannibal makes his habitual check of the doors and windows, and then goes to the bedroom. The door of the en suite is open, and he smiles, sitting on the bed to unbutton his shirt and to watch Bedelia putting her hair up for the night. It's a complex and variable ritual, and always interesting. She catches his eye in the mirror and smiles back at him.

They putter through the rhythms of their night like the old married couple they are, and at last lie side by side between clean sheets, the moon throwing a tree shadow on the wall. Hannibal chuckles, and Bedelia makes a small, enquiring noise from where her head is resting on his chest. He cups the back of her neck, gently rubbing there since her hair is neatly pinned up all over, and he doesn't want to inconvenience her.

“Just thinking over the day, mio caro.”

“A very pleasant day,” Bedelia says. “Were you surprised to see Will at the bake sale?”

“Even more so to see you placed right next to him. Did you arrange that?”

“Not at all,” she says, chuckling. “He's a strange, twitchy little man, but he's sweet, I think.” She tells him about Will's catty little dig at their profession, and it makes him laugh. He has always been charmed by sarcastic boys with beautiful eyes, and Will is no exception. “I also told him that you were full of childish mischief,” Bedelia says. “He seemed a little charmed, even if he is straight.”

Hannibal purrs. “I dearly hope he isn't,” he says, and Bedelia laughs.

“We really are ridiculous, diletto.”

He chuckles, tugging her up to kiss her. “All human endeavor is, carissima. And of course, I can do nothing but talk until June. Let an old man console himself.”

“A filthy old man,” Bedelia tells him, finding his erection under the sheet. “Insatiable and irrepressible.”

“As if you would want me to be repressed,” Hannibal says, and then shudders, biting his lip.

Bedelia guides him onto his side and tugs his hand down so that they can be more mutual, and Hannibal sighs, kissing her slowly as he delicately strokes her clit before pushing two fingers into her. There's a steady, slow thrust in that Bedelia particularly enjoys, a push along her G-spot that would be rough if she wasn't already nicely wet. As it is, it's just measured and firm, the same way she's working his foreskin. They get a little competitive, moving faster as each tries to get the other to come first, and Hannibal is incredibly pleased with himself when Bedelia loses, even if it's only by about ten seconds.

They keep it quiet, just gasping and biting onto each other's shoulders as they shake through their separate climaxes, cleaning up with the wet wipes again, too tired to shower properly. This time Hannibal does a good enough job on Bedelia that she won't actually have to have one before she's fit to go into public, in case she wakes up late again. She's asleep by the time he's done, and he smiles, kissing her forehead and cuddling her close.

Hannibal ends up being the one to wake up late, but Bedelia starts some eggs boiling for Abigail, and he's able to recover the lost time and to slice and arrange the eggs attractively on toast points. They get to school a few minutes early, as Abigail likes to do, and Hannibal sternly reminds himself that it doesn't matter if he's not as well-dressed as he likes to be when in the presence of sarcastic boys with beautiful eyes.

Will is sitting slumped at his desk, blinking at Sky where she perches on his finger, regarding him curiously. His failure to shave is even more complete than usual, but that and the bags under his eyes don't do much to detract from his beauty. He's wearing a threadbare polo shirt with one side of the collar sticking up, as well as the sheepish expression of a man sweating out a hangover at work.

“Good morning,” he croaks, and goes on to assure Abigail that he just has a headache, putting Sky back into her cage with a treat to nibble on. He doesn't seem at all surprised when Hannibal takes him aside while Abigail watches the bird, but deeply surprised to be given painkillers and a gentle admonition to take it easy.

Will Has A Hangover, And Nick Boyle Has Detention

When Hannibal texts Bedelia that Will is hungover and to be gentle with him if she sees him, she laughs, sipping mineral water and picking at the remains of her salad.

Hopefully Abigail will be waiting outside she replies, after sending Hannibal her usual picture of his lovingly packed lunch eaten entirely or nearly so, *but if not, I'll handle him with care.*

He is already precious to me, Bedelia dear.

When three-thirty finally rolls around, it turns out that Abigail is not waiting outside, and Bedelia remembers Hannibal's text as she clicks her way into the building, looking for the kid. She finds Abigail still in the classroom, sullenly cramming things into her bag, little face streaked with tears.

“Sweetheart,” Bedelia says, going to her and crouching beside her, “what's wrong?”

Abigail doesn't look at her. “Stupid Nick tried to pull my scarf off and I punched him and he said I was crazy and that social services would take me away.” She zips the bag, her lower lip still wobbling just a little.

“Told her that wasn't true,” Will says from his desk. He's resting his head in his hands, and he sounds exhausted. “Nick has three days in-school suspension, since forcibly removing items of people's clothing is to be discouraged, as are threats. Particularly cruel ones.”

“Thank you,” Bedelia says, full of cold fury. “And the consequences for Abigail?”

“I saw the whole thing,” he says, not raising his head. “Technically she should have detention for fighting, but she was minding her own business.”

She hugs Abigail tightly, murmuring to her that her adoption is legal and complete and that at this point she's about as hard to take away as a biological kid, and that one incident of self-defense won't do it. She's still tense in Bedelia's arms. “I was just trying to read,” she mutters, sounding so angry and hurt that Bedelia rocks her a little, even though she'll be nine this summer.

“I know, sweetheart,” she says softly, “I know.” She looks over at Will. “Thank you.”

“Don't mention it,” he says, looking so young and so pained and exhausted that she wants to hug him, too. She settles for a smile. “Hey, Abigail?” he says.

“Yeah, Mr. Graham?”

“You can hold the rat, if you want.” Bedelia already wanted to let him know that she doesn't care about his hangover (or at least, not in a moral way,) and now she wants to cover his stubbly face with kisses.

Of course, even if Abigail was perfectly cheerful and had been warned, Bedelia would do no such thing here and now. With her daughter still upset, her focus is on using a moist wipe to get the salt off of her face as she says that she would love to, perking up significantly.

“I hope we didn't upset you, Algernon,” Abigail says when Will carefully puts the white rat into her cupped hands.

Bedelia has no real desire to hold the creature herself, but she can see the attraction. He is small, and alive, and not the least bit judgmental. Will goes over to his desk and returns with the kind of all-natural granola bar that Hannibal buys, opening it and breaking off a corner so that Abigail can give it to Algernon as a treat.

“It won't make him sick, right?”

“Not any more than one piece of birthday cake would make you sick,” he says, and she giggles, watching Algernon nibble the tidbit from her fingertips, as calm as a puppy.

There's a high chirp from the bird, and Will laughs, going to give her a piece too, and having a brief, whistling conversation with her. She smooths her ruffled feathers, and submits to being gently stroked on her tiny head with one fingertip.

“There, Sky,” he croons, “justice is restored.”

Abigail giggles. “You're lucky Ishtar doesn't care.”

Will just smiles, and gives her a few more moments before gently taking the rat and putting it back in its cage. Abigail is much happier now, but an upset like this will require supplemental treatment. Abigail washes her hands while Bedelia gathers her things and thanks Will again before leading her daughter to the car. Once their seatbelts are buckled and everything else in order, she starts the drive home, careful to use the route that passes the area's best gelato shop.

Even with her feelings still raw, Abigail can't help but perk up a bit at the sight of the place. Naturally, with Hannibal's and Bedelia's own standards for food, it's a very particular shop where the staff make everything on-site and rose is one of the usual flavors. They also like Abigail, and always make good recommendations when she's deciding on a flavor. Today she chooses peach, and eats her small cup slowly at one of the outdoor tables, while Bedelia takes careful bites of stracciatella.

“Thanks, Mom,” Abigail says, about halfway through her cup.

“Of course, dear,” she says. “Is it helping?”

Abigail giggles. “Yeah.”

“Good.”

Bedelia asks her about the incident in more detail, now that she's calm. Apparently Nick had said something about his little sister, but Abigail is pretty sure she has never even seen her. Bedelia takes note of it for later, and when Abigail asks if she's sure that everything is fine,

tells her that it is. When they get home, Bedelia takes her into the office to look at the carefully archived paperwork. Naturally, Bedelia and Hannibal have kept everything, and there are digitized copies as well, because if anyone is going to have the terrifying legal rights of parenthood over this small person they both love, it's going to be themselves.

After Abigail is completely reassured, Bedelia gets her started on her homework and sets Hannibal's pretty plate of cheese, crackers, and grapes at her elbow before opening a bottle of rose because she deserves it, goddammit. She pours herself a glass and stretches out in the recliner, eyes closed as Abigail reads her answers aloud to be confirmed or rejected.

Beverly Knows What's Up

The thing about being hungover on the job when you're a teacher is that there's a high risk of judgey assholes acting like your job is to perform open heart surgery on their brats, not impart technical knowledge and keep them from killing each other. He's still not sure what to make of Hannibal just giving him painkillers in the morning, but he has to suppose that even if Bedelia's values differ, she's glad that he's not criminalizing self-defense.

Nick's parents are probably going to complain, and Will is reminding himself to stand firm as he drives over to Beverly's house. It's her fault he's hungover, and the least she can do is provide tea and listen to him bitch. She lives much closer to the school than he does, and soon he's pulling up to the curb outside her house. There are flowers alongside the path to her door in summer, but this time of year he has to settle for the red and gold leaves of the trees.

Even if Beverly is an evil purveyor of Demon Alcohol, some of Will's ire evaporates when Beverly opens the door and lets out a cloud of the sweet scent of plum tea.

“Maybe you're not so bad,” Will tells her, and she laughs, looking damnably fresh-faced.

“It's not my fault we got our stereotypes mixed up in the wash.”

“You're part German,” Will mutters, “that matters.”

Beverly just laughs again, shutting the door behind him and leading him to where the tea is steeping, a plate of cookies beside it.

As usual, the tea revives Will, and soon he can forgive her for making him take part in her evil bacchanal. “Even if I looked so bad that the male half of the Lecter-Du Maurier firm gave me painkillers when he dropped his daughter off.”

Beverly whistles. “Wow. You know, nobody said we had to finish that second pitcher.”

“You impugned upon my manhood,” Will grumbles, and takes a long sip of tea.

Beverly tosses her hair out of her face and dunks a cookie in her tea. “Someone needs to do something to your manhood. Are you sure they aren't cruising you?”

Will rolls his eyes. “Beverly, why in the hell would they be cruising me?”

“Because you're like a sad-faced, bedraggled puppy only it's not weird if they fuck you?”

“Yeah, but they're so...”

“Old?” she asks, pulling the softened cookie out and eating it slowly.

“I was going to say 'refined,' but that too.” He sets another few cookies onto his saucer. They're store-bought, some Korean thing flavored with aniseed that always makes him think of Beverly. “Besides, their kid is in my class.”

“It's true,” Beverly says, “you are technically the help, and people of true refinement don't fuck the help.”

“See?”

“They might be waiting for summer, though. That's what I'd do.”

“Beverly...”

“You wanna fuck them?” she asks, bright-eyed and innocent. “Wanna be the meat in a silver fox sandwich?”

“I cannot believe that someone so filthy-minded is entrusted with moulding the moral character of our youth,” Will says, and Beverly snickers, pouring herself more tea.

“You love me and you know it.”

He sighs, thinking about the end of his day rather than the beginning, now. “I do love you and you do know it. I also respect your professional judgment,” he says, and tells her about the incident with Nick and Abigail. “I feel like I'm right,” he concludes, “but she did hit him pretty hard.”

“Yeah, but it's also technically on the sexual assault continuum, and I couldn't think of something that mean to say if I thought about it for an hour. It's not like you're going to hold a grudge against the kid.”

And Will won't, no matter how much of a dickhead the kid might've been, because none of them are older than nine. “True,” he says, draining his cup. “I think he was trying to avenge his sister, but it has to be a case of mistaken identity. Abigail didn't even know he had a sister.”

“She could be lying, but innocent until proven guilty,” Beverly says, and Will shrugs.

“She's a pretty honest kid. She values peace and quiet and is gentle with the animals.”

“My friend the Beastmaster.”

“Speaking of which,” he says, “I have to go rescue my dogs.”

“Of course. Go home, recover. Try to forgive me for my role in your destruction.”

Will does his best with her instructions, and as he sprawls on his bed, the door open so the dogs can run in and out and a frozen pizza in the oven, he wonders what on earth he should do if the Lecter-Du Mauriers *are* cruising him. He's not sure if the idea is more terrifying or hot. He also wonders if it's a cuckold situation or if Hannibal is actually bi. Will prefers the latter, and has to curse Beverly anew for planting the idea in his mind of himself pressed between them.

Will reminds himself very firmly that he's the help, and does his best not to speculate too much. It helps that Winston and Querida come over to beg him to throw a disgusting old

tennis ball for them. It's always good to have an interest. That's one reason he keeps so many dogs.

Later, he carefully doles out pieces of pizza crust, making sure that no one jumps or snaps or growls at their neighbor. He informs them that they are good dogs. In fact, the very bestest dogs ever. A glance at the clock strikes something in his subconscious, and makes him remember his resolution to call his father. It's not too much later in Florida if he does it now, and Thursday is a good day for it.

His dad answers on the third ring. “Will?” He's starting to really sound like a cranky old man, and Will smiles.

“Yeah, Dad, it's me.” His dad is always up to the same things, fixing motors and puttering around with his dogs, but it's still nice to catch up with him, and Will smiles, lounging on his bed as Dad tells him all about his latest unreasonable client, one of many who don't realize that old men do slow and careful work, and that Dad doesn't pad his estimates to impress.

Justice And Gelato Are Served

Gelato and not getting in trouble have helped Abigail's hurt feelings a lot, and it's soothing to do her math worksheet while Mom sips pink wine and rests her feet. Some of the kids hate story problems, but Abigail likes them. For one thing, they're not much harder than the other kind, but everyone thinks they are, so teachers always give less of them. She eats another cracker with cheese as she contemplates the current one before reading it aloud to Mom as she works it. Mom looks asleep in the recliner, but Abigail knows that she's awake, because she offers advice whenever Abigail is wrong, and congratulations when she isn't.

By the time Abigail has finished her math and is halfway through her English assignment, Dad comes home, and she hops up to hug him extra hard today. He picks her up even though she's nearly nine, and when he sets her down again he looks into her eyes the way he does when he's worried that she's getting sick.

“What's wrong, sweetheart?”

“I'm feeling better now,” she says. “But Nick was a jerk to me and made me scared I'd get taken away.”

“Did he, now?” Dad asks softly, in that quiet way that means he's angry, but not at her.

“Justice has been served, Hannibal,” Mom says, getting up from the chair and bringing her half-full glass with her as she comes over to kiss Dad hello. “Abigail can tell you all about it.”

“Very well,” he says, and goes upstairs to put his stuff away and change his shirt, while Abigail goes and gets his recipe box. After she sets it on the counter, Mom puts her hair up so it will *stay* up, and Abigail washes her hands. Dad smiles when he comes back down and sees her ready to help with dinner.

One of the nice things about having two psychiatrists for parents is that both of them know how to listen without interrupting all the time. She tells him about Nick yelling at her at third recess, and how she thinks maybe his little sister's name is Cassie, but that she doesn't bully any of the younger kids, honest.

“I know you don't, dear,” Dad says, slicing up the carrots she just peeled, so fast it seems impossible that he doesn't cut himself. “And I'm glad you know that no one can take you away from us over so trifling a thing.”

Later on, Dad gives her thirds of the casserole even though she can't finish it, and reads her two whole books at bedtime. Abigail doesn't have nightmares, but she does have a tense dream about a test she hasn't studied for, and is very glad to wake up in the morning. Mom is already awake, still dressed in her fluffy blue robe as she sits in the kitchen, sipping her coffee.

Mom smiles when she sees Abigail, and beckons her over. Abigail goes, relaxing as Mom hugs her and presses a kiss to the top of her head. “Good morning, dear,” she says quietly. “Sleep well?”

“I dreamed about a big test I hadn't studied for,” she says, “but I don't feel tired.”

“Well,” Mom says, “there's no big tests in the real world for another two weeks, and you're doing very well in math.”

Abigail thanks her, and Mom gives her a little coffee with a lot of milk and sugar. They decide to let Dad sleep a little longer, since Mom makes perfectly good toast and scrambled eggs, and there's already a chilled and membraned mix of oranges and red grapefruits.

Dad laughs when he comes downstairs, and thanks Mom for cooking, giving her a big kiss that makes Abigail gag and roll her eyes, even though she's glad they get along and she doesn't have to figure out where to spend Christmas every year. They talk about work as Dad eats, and he washes the dishes while Mom and Abigail go upstairs to get dressed. Abigail grabs the first scarf that comes to hand, and is still pulling her shirt on when she goes to Mom and Dad's room.

She's usually not up early enough to watch Mom do her makeup and curl her hair, and it's always fascinating. Today she fills her lips in with a pencil and then puts a stain and gloss over them. Mom wears more makeup than other lady Abigail can think of, but she never looks silly. It looks pretty, and like there's hardly any of it there at all. She puts on mascara and two kinds of eyeliner and that's just the beginning.

She has Abigail hand her things, and explains the applied color theory involved, and how to keep hair from getting too hot on the curling iron She agrees with Dad that Abigail is too young for makeup and things like that, but she also says that she wants her daughter to have some idea what she's doing when she experiments with it later. Abigail isn't sure if she wants to or not, but she does like the glittery, strawberry-flavored lip gloss that Grandma Hobbs had given her for her last birthday, and that her parents let her wear on special occasions.

On the way to school with Dad later, she asks if she can wear some makeup for picture day. He sighs, passing Mrs. Henderson, who always drives so far below the speed limit that it gets her in trouble sometimes.

“I suppose so, sweetheart,” he says. “You are growing up, and your hair doesn't seem to have been hurt by letting your mother curl it for Christmas Eve.”

“I want to do both for picture day,” she says, and isn't quite sure why Dad laughs. At least he's in a good mood. They're a little early, and Abigail whistles to Sky as Dad and Mr. Graham talk.

Hannibal Cannot Refrain From Drawing Will

Naturally, Will deflects Hannibal's thanks for being understanding of his daughter, because he's a good teacher and sees being decent and taking things seriously as his duty. He glances over to make sure that Abigail is too engrossed with the budgerigar to eavesdrop, and the whole motion is adorably furtive.

“Really,” he says, glancing back to Hannibal with those bluer than blue eyes, “I need to thank you. You're probably the only reason I survived that hangover.”

Hannibal chuckles. “It was the least I could do.”

Will runs a hand through his messy hair, and offers Hannibal a rueful smile. “Beverly Katz and I have a thing where we drink and watch R-rated movies after all the enforced wholesomeness of game day.”

“And you overdid it this time?” Hannibal asks, trying to memorize Will's face well enough to sketch it without being obvious.

“She impugned upon my manhood,” Will says, utterly straight-faced, and Hannibal grins at him.

“You seem more sensible than that.”

“It's all an elaborate facade, I assure you,” Will says, and looks over at Abigail again, smiling to see her gently hissing at Ishtar. “She seems more cheerful.”

“Bedelia took her out for gelato, and showed her all the finalization paperwork.”

Will smiles, amused and a little sad. “That'd do it, I guess.”

“We take our responsibilities very seriously,” Hannibal says, “and we are pleased that you do the same.”

He chuckles, looking young and adorably bashful. “Thanks,” he mutters, and Hannibal takes mercy on him, checking his watch and announcing the truth, that he needs to get going.

He kisses the top of Abigail's head and tells her to be good, making his way out to the parking lot, studying the various decorations and projects on the walls. He smiles when he finds Abigail's poster of the water cycle, remembering his service as color consultant. The ocean is Crayola cerulean, and full of pink and purple fish.

Leaving the building, Hannibal promises himself that he won't sketch Will in the margins of his therapy notes. He's more professional than that, and entirely too old. He is very stern with himself, and actually manages to confine his lapses to loose-leaf paper on his breaks. That one is a speculative nude is just Hannibal's cross to bear, and he stops at the waist.

After dinner that night, he shows Bedelia his drawings, and she laughs, spreading them out on the bed. “Oh, Hannibal,” she says, “you really are in love with this one, aren't you?”

“I'm afraid so,” he says. “Is that all right?”

“It wouldn't be if I didn't find him so charming, myself,” she says, taking a sip of her wine, “but you're in the clear.”

Hannibal chuckles, gazing up at his wife from where he's sprawled on top of the duvet next to the pictures. “Good. I would hate to trouble you.”

“I am only troubled by the long wait until spring, dear,” she says, accepting his glass when he hands it to her for more wine.

“At least if he responds favorably, sending Abigail to camp won't be quite such a wrench,” Hannibal points out, taking his full glass and then catching Bedelia's hand to kiss it.

She smiles at him. “True,” she says, and runs her fingers through his hair before pulling her hand back. “Do you suppose he's hairy, or smooth?”

“One would assume chest hair from the permanent facial stubble, but people can be surprising that way.”

“I suppose if he were smooth it might be a nice contrast,” Bedelia says, reaching over again to undo a few more of Hannibal's shirt buttons.

He chuckles, and makes a small noise of contentment as she slips her hand into his shirt, stroking his chest hair and then gently tugging. He shudders and purrs, leaning into her touch. She toys with him for a little while, finding and pinching one nipple to make him hiss. He puts his glass on the nearest safe surface and lets Bedelia roll him onto his back and undo a few more buttons. This is risky, since Abigail is not safely in bed yet, but they must take their moments where they find them. Besides, when he last saw her, she was engrossed in her current book, and had at least half its length to go.

Bedelia seems to be making similar calculations, and gets Hannibal's shirt open quickly so that she can crawl over him and suck one nipple and then the other as they both keep an ear out for the patter of little feet. Hannibal's focus wavers quickly, and he bites onto the heel of his hand as Bedelia chuckles, unbuckling his belt as she kisses her way down, nuzzling him through his briefs before hopping up to lock the door. The days of Abigail having regular nightmares and needing to come and find them for reassurance at odd hours are mostly past, but far better safe than sorry. Hannibal uses Bedelia's brief absence to wriggle his way out of his clothes, biting his lip at the incidental contact with his cock. She chuckles when she joins him again, and gently pushes him back down on the mattress.

They always have to be quiet, these days. It's one of the sacrifices of parenthood, and Hannibal grabs his pillow and bites onto the edge as Bedelia purrs and takes him into her mouth. She just toys with him at first, and then sucks him down all the way, with just the smallest press of teeth at the very base, a nonverbal *I could be devouring you* as her skilled throat milks him. He keeps one hand in her hair, just gently holding on, the other clutching at

the pillow and cramming more of it into his mouth to muffle a desperate groan. Bedelia tightens around in him in that peculiar way that means she's doing her best to laugh at him with her mouth so full, and Hannibal lets it take him over the edge, since trying to last is more an imposition than a favor in situations like this.

Lazy Weekend

Hannibal is always so cute, post-coital. He's like an enormous sleepy house cat, and if things were technically one-sided he always mumbles helplessly about reciprocation. Now Bedelia just gathers him into her arms for a while and murmurs that he can always owe her.

Abigail comes trotting up the stairs about five seconds after Bedelia has dragged her sex-drunk husband through putting himself to rights, of course. He gives her a look of profound gratitude, and goes out to sign Abigail's reading log. It's a state requirement, and Will regards it with the same polite contempt that Hannibal does. Children will read or they won't. In a lot of households, the assignment is really just a lesson on forgery and falsifying reports, and everyone knows it.

It may be Friday night, but they never want Abigail to get too far off schedule. Bedelia waits for the child to finish a last episode of Steven Universe, and then ushers her off to bed a good hour later than she does during the week. She's very tired, but stays awake for the entirety of Hamster Huey And The Gooey Kablooie and for a spirited rendition of the Happy Hamster Hop. Ridiculous it may be, but it's good for Bedelia's thighs and it makes her daughter happy, so she can hardly mind it.

After she tiptoes out of Abigail's room, Hannibal catches her in the hallway and insists on discharging his obligations. Bedelia's drive may be lower than his, but nowhere near low enough for her to object. She may be tired, but none of them have anywhere to be tomorrow, so she just stretches out and pets Hannibal while he licks his way into her with those sweet purring noises of real enjoyment.

“As always,” he murmurs, “you taste exquisite.”

“Such a charmer,” she coos, gently tugging at his hair. She has to muffle a cry of her own as she comes, and Hannibal laps her through it with his usual gentle generosity, moaning softly into her flesh as she shudders to a stop. He sighs, resting his head on her thigh as she lazily strokes his hair.

“You have to move,” Bedelia says at last, and he makes a complaining noise. “I'm not letting good wine turn into vinegar,” she adds, and he chuckles, finally hauling himself up so that she can roll to the side and retrieve the wine, pouring all that remains into their two glasses.

Hannibal chuckles, sitting up to clink his glass to Bedelia's. “Words to live by, beloved.”

At their age they know how much wine is too much, and wake up comfortably on Saturday morning. Abigail has therapy on alternate Saturdays, but not today, and never until afternoon, so she can sleep late and everyone can have breakfast together. Mimosas are reserved for Sunday, but Bedelia does quite well with fresh-squeezed orange juice while Hannibal initiates Abigail into the mysteries of making the perfect waffle.

After the mildly traumatic end to Abigail's week, Bedelia is pleased to see her in good spirits over the weekend. The idea of a pet is brought up again, and Hannibal seems to be softening

on the subject of shed hair and its many discontents. Bedelia personally wouldn't mind a cat at all, and says so later. Hannibal just chuckles and says something about being outnumbered if it comes to a vote.

For all the contentment of the weekend, Abigail ties her scarf in a very secure chain knot on Monday, and Bedelia makes sure to be particularly affectionate when they part and a little anxious until they reunite in the afternoon. Since Abigail's new nemesis is serving his sentence, she doesn't even see him again until Thursday, and apparently he's mature enough to return the favor when Abigail ignores him.

Even though Bedelia's childhood was several geologic ages ago and now time flies by, she remembers the pattern, that every year she would be almost glad to go back to school for the sake of something to do, and how about six weeks in the novelty would wear off and leave her violently bored. Abigail undergoes the same process, but does it gracefully enough. It helps that she actually likes her teacher this year and that Will seems to be doing his best to keep things interesting, bless his heart.

He brings in a guest speaker and does art projects and gets extra time in the computer lab and library, but Abigail is still completely bored by mid-October, with only picture day and the promise of Halloween to sustain her. She still hasn't decided what to be, but Bedelia isn't worried. With Hannibal's and her own combined powers, they can do anything Abigail sets her mind to.

For now, Bedelia is engaged in costuming of another kind. Picture day is upon them, and she's pinning two small braids into a crown around Abigail's head while the curling iron warms. At least there's still time, even after Abigail's fit of indecision over which dress to wear. The simple green one she's wearing is actually elegant without being too old for her, and Bedelia tells her so as she curls her hair, so fine and so dark.

“Are we finished?” Hannibal asks, leaning in the door. “You need to leave for the office within the next ten minutes, Bedelia.”

“Now we are,” she says, sliding a last bobby pin in place, because Abigail's hair is so sleek that things want to fall out of it. This is secure, though, and Abigail hugs her tightly in gratitude. Bedelia smiles. “Have a good day, dearest,” she says, and presses a kiss to Hannibal's cheek on her way out.

Picture Day

Will has a love-hate relationship with picture day. On the one hand, it's a bit of a break for the kids, and he's happy when they're happy. On the other, he has to have his picture taken. He glares at his reflection, blazer and unnecessary glasses in place. He's never sure if he looks more like a normal teacher this way, or more like the calm photo of some man who was 'so quiet' before the massacre.

As a kid, it wasn't so bad. His dad would buy one of the cheaper photo packages, Will would make sure he wasn't wearing anything torn, and only scowl if the photographer was really insistent on getting him to smile. They'd forget about the whole thing for a while, and then the pictures would arrive and Dad would replace the wallet one from last year and stash the others in a manilla envelope because picture frames were something that happened to other people.

Now, Will is supposed to look presentable and professional and herd his class through the whole process, which some of them don't even want to do. They're balanced out by the budding models, at least, who preen so much that Will has to work hard not to laugh. He also has to not punch the photographer, which is hard because for the last three years they've sent the same smarmy, slightly creepy fucker. He puts Will's hackles up, and leaves him feeling watchful and disgruntled every year, not that anyone has ever complained or that he's even alone with the kids in the first place.

The kids, bless their hearts, seem mostly not to notice or care, though the more spirited ones sometimes roll their eyes or sneer at his saccharine crap. Will tries not to have favorites, but he has to admit that he likes them just a little bit better. Abigail notices, and it goddamn rends Will's heart to see how nervous she looks. He catches her eye past the guy, and does his best to telepathically transmit that he won't let anything happen to her. Will avoids eye contact so much because this telepathy actually almost works sometimes, like now. Abigail smiles at him, and the photographer manages to catch it in all its glory.

The staff photos are done during lunch and recess, and at least this year Will doesn't have to cut into his meal time to hang out with the asshole photographer. The background is an artful arrangement of diagonal shadows, available in grey, blue, amber, green, pink, and red. Will picks grey because he doesn't care, and sits on the stool with the same feeling he has every year, that maybe he should get into a more dignified line of work. He does not smile. He gets two free 5 x 7 glossies and a wallet set every damn year, and he has no idea who the fuck is supposed to want them. He looks pretty much the same each year, Dad already has the one that commemorates Will's first year of teaching, and Morgan, well... Morgan has better pictures of him, taken every summer.

He reminds himself to give her a call. There's one actually scheduled every two weeks, but Will likes to surprise the kid now and then. The thought of her makes him smile, but he's safe, the picture is already taken and he can get back to setting up today's science experiment, which is about the nature of sound.

Everyone needs a bowl, one of the cheap plastic set that Will keeps in the supply closet for things like this. Stretching plastic wrap over every single one and then securing each with a rubber band keeps him occupied for the rest of recess, but by the time the kids come clattering in, bright-eyed with exercise and the crisp fall day, Will has most of the bowls done.

As quiet as he can be, Will has never had much of a problem keeping order, and soon everyone is at their desks, attention ensured by the presence of colored sugar. Will always lets the kids eat it afterward, since it's only about two teaspoons apiece and can't do them much harm. For now he explains the procedure and then writes up the questions they're supposed to answer on the blackboard.

Even in a noisy classroom this one works pretty well, and Will walks around to check on everyone as they hum and sing and speak by the plastic, watching the reaction of the sugar grains to the vibration. Some are convinced that it's their breath at first, but understanding soon dawns. Will has always liked hands-on stuff like this. He'd rather just set the kids up and let them go than talk them to death.

Writing the experiment up and watching a much more complicated one online carries them most of the way to lunch. Will eats at his desk and monitors the room as usual, pleased to see that while Nick sneers at Abigail's Hello Kitty bento, he carries on his campaign of ignoring her. Abigail ignores him right back, and Will is very pleased with them both.

The rest of the day passes without incident, except for his own ridiculous flutter of *something* when Bedelia comes to pick Abigail up. She steps almost into his arms to straighten his collar like she does it every day, and he's filled with perfume, warmth, and terror.

She steps back and smiles up at him. “There.”

He swallows. “Thanks.”

After they leave, he gathers up the animals. As soon as he's home and everyone has been taken care of, he settles onto the couch and calls Morgan. She has her own phone as a safety measure, and Will is honored to be one about three people on earth trusted with the number.

Morgan picks up quickly. “Hi!”

Will smiles, leaning back into the arm of the couch and petting Buster as he jumps up beside him. “Hi. You have a minute to talk?”

“Sure, Dad. We were working my Halloween costume, but we have to let it dry.”

“What are you gonna be this year?”

“I'm a phoenix!” Morgan loves mythology, and Will lets her tell him the old story, smiling at her enthusiasm.

Halloween

As far as Abigail is concerned, Halloween can not come fast enough. It might be her favorite holiday, between dressing up and getting regular candy. It's not as if she doesn't like the chocolates Dad makes, but they're very real, and sometimes she likes fakey chocolate. And gummis, and super-sour stuff, and actual gum, and those weird Razzle things, and suckers. These things are hard to acquire in the Lecter-Du Maurier household, to say nothing of the fun of trick-or-treating, itself.

The best part of Halloween is really the costumes, though, and Abigail can't believe that Mom is content to be the same thing every year. Like her, Dad believes in change. It's another one of those quiet and guilty comparisons, because her birth father never dressed up. She remembers her birth mother dressing as angel, and she's glad that if Mom has to be the same thing all the time, it's a witch. She wears a long black dress made out of something smooth and just a little shiny, and it has a hem like Batman's cape. Abigail takes inspiration from it this year for her bat costume.

Dad is going to be the Devil, which Abigail supposes is a good match. It's not as good as when she was Little Red Riding Hood and he was the wolf, but they can't be perfect every year. Right now she's helping him make his hooves out of an old pair of what everyone else calls 'dress shoes.' For Dad, they're just shoes, and it's weirder when he wears sneakers or boots.

This pair is older than Abigail, though, so he was willing to glue on pieces of wood to make the kind of hooves that are called 'cloven.' Abigail is painting them black for him, but she has to wait for each coat to dry before she can add another. She carefully wipes her hands and takes off her smeared smock, leaving them beside the hooves on the garage floor. Mom can deal with a lot of craft projects, but this one is pretty messy.

When she steps inside, and the inside jack-o-lantern gives her a friendly leer, and the house smells like chocolate. Dad makes the white chocolate ones first, for people who are allergic to regular chocolate or don't like it, and then goes darker and darker before he starts doing things like adding sea salt or mint. He's near the end now, making smooth, nearly-black spheres of chocolate. He looks over his shoulder at Abigail and smiles.

“There you are. I think the white ones are completely hardened, now.”

Abigail of course helps him test each batch, and now she hops up onto a chair to neatly pluck one from the parchment paper. She likes actual chocolate better, but the white is lovely and creamy, and she gives Dad a thumbs up that makes him laugh. She spends that whole evening bouncing back and forth between testing chocolates and working on the shoes, while Mom touches up Abigail's store-bought bat wings to make them even more awesome.

Halloween is on Saturday this year, so everyone can stay out late, and on Friday they have a school party, where Mr. Graham passes out candy and lets them play games for the last hour of the day. A lot of the games are educational, sure, but Abigail supposes that that's only fair.

Mr. Graham wanders around the edges to make sure everyone is playing nice, occasionally eating a lemon drop, and actually listening when people who aren't wearing their costumes tell him what they're going to be. Abigail is saving hers. She has Views about Halloween, and Mom said that she wanted to do a little more work on the wings, anyway.

Sure enough, after Mom picks Abigail up, she brings the wings downstairs and finishes up the little thumb-claws while Abigail tries to power through all her homework so she won't even have to think about it later. She still has some left when Dad comes home, but it's a good start.

After dinner, Dad carefully arranges the candy bowl for tomorrow, with its little bags of chocolates, neatly labeled with all the ingredients as well as Dad's full name and their address. Some parents still don't want their kids taking anything homemade and there are some kids who can't have candy, so Dad also has a bowl of little wind-up toys of various Halloween-y creatures, cats and rats and bats and snakes.

Abigail goes to check on the outside jack-o-lanterns, to make sure they're still fresh. She comes back inside and tries not to bound around too much, even though she's so excited she's not sure how she's going to sleep. Mom smiles at her, carefully adding some highlights to Dad's devil horns with a bottle of nail polish.

On Saturday it seems to take forever to get dark, and of course Dad makes Abigail eat a big, healthy dinner before they go out. It's totally aggravating, but at last she's free to put on her costume. She dresses in all black and shrugs into her wings, giving them a few flaps before putting on her hat, tying it under her chin and then putting on an orange scarf.

Mom has promised to do her eye makeup, so Abigail goes to find her. She's in her and Dad's room, sitting at her mirror and doing her own elaborate eyeliner. She sees Abigail in the mirror and smiles.

“I'll be ready in just a minute, sweetheart,” she says, and Abigail sits on the foot of the bed to watch her work. She's wearing her witch dress, and always Abigail admires the way the long sleeves come to points over the backs of her hands. Her hat is sitting on the bed next to Abigail, the crown elegantly bent to the side and a little net veil hanging from the wide brim.

In another couple of minutes, Mom finishes her makeup and puts on her spider pendant, turning to Abigail. “Bring me my hat, dear,” she says, “and we'll get to work.”

Halloween II

After Hannibal's brief tenure as the Big Bad Wolf, he had resolved not to do anything that requires spirit gum for another two years, at least. Being the Devil is much easier. A dark suit, a red tie, horns, hooves, and just enough contouring makeup to take his face from gaunt to a skull-like mask. He thought about red contacts, but in the end it was just too much of an expenditure for something that he won't be able to wear in ten years.

“Dad,” Abigail calls from the hallway, “are you ready?”

“I am, dear,” he tells her, putting his supplies away and stepping out of the bathroom to admire his little bat, who's bobbing on her toes and flapping her wings with excitement. “That's a well-chosen scarf,” he says, “and your mother did a very good job.”

“I know, right?” The bouncing escalates to an actual jump, and she flaps her way into the kitchen when she lands, hopping up to sit at the kitchen table and politely not touching the candy bowl, even though it could survive her taking one of the tiny bags for herself. Bedelia smiles as Hannibal comes to join them, and opens a bottle of wine.

“Small one before you go?”

“Very small,” Hannibal says, holding up two lateral fingers as an indicator and then taking the glass with the same hand. The wine is very good, dark and subtle, and Hannibal savors his first, slow sip.

“Save me some of this,” he says, since on a night when she's allowed to get a bit drunk and has nothing to do but sit and wait for people, a whole bottle can disappear.

Bedelia chuckles. “I will.”

“You know,” Abigail says, watching the cat hop across the table, “these are pretty cool.”

“I'm glad you think so,” Hannibal says. “The bats are my favorite.”

Abigail giggles. “Yeah, bats are great.”

Cindy is supposed to join them soon. Her mother is always very busy, and this year a set of even more premature than expected quadruplets has kept her on the verge of total exhaustion. It's paying off, the children are doing much better, but of course she is beyond grateful to entrust her daughter's Halloween fun to Hannibal and Abigail.

When the doorbell rings, it's Cindy and her father. He has circles under his eyes and is wearing a button that reads: THIS IS MY COSTUME, but Cindy looks as chipper as ever, dressed as a silvery, boxy robot, her mask tucked under one arm. As the girls admire each other, Hannibal and Rob go over the basics, Bedelia sipping her wine and listening. Cindy is to eat nothing before a responsible adult has looked it over, she is expected to be finished by

twelve-thirty, and that Hannibal can text him if she wants to compare candy and talk about the night until one or so, since she'll be able to sleep late tomorrow and it's only once a year.

“I will be as watchful as I am with Abigail,” Hannibal promises, and Rob chuckles. Hannibal has always found him attractive in a quiet and mousy way, and now he sees a faint resemblance to Will Graham that explains everything.

“I know you will. Maybe next year we can return the favor,” he says, and Hannibal smiles.

“Please, there's no obligation. Abigail is my excuse to go trick-or-treating at my age, and Cindy is excellent company.”

Rob thanks him for the compliment, and gratefully accepts white chocolates for his wife and milk chocolate for himself to share with Cindy's little brother, a child of about eighteen months. “You be a good robot, Cindy,” he says, and grins when she puts her mask on and beeps at him. “All of you look great, have a good time!” He waves in farewell and vanishes into the night.

“Poor thing looks tired,” Bedelia says, and Cindy nods.

“Yeah,” she says, her voice a little muffled, “Ben is having trouble sleeping, and Dad has to stay up with him every time because Mom is too tired to take turns.”

“Well, I'm glad we could spare them,” Hannibal says. “Do do you have a bag?” Cindy pulls a pillowcase from inside the robot's boxy torso, and Abigail laughs.

“Perfect! I just have this lame plastic pumpkin, but Dad has huge pockets, it should work out.”

After a last check to be sure that everything is in order and that Bedelia is comfortably settled with her wine and some of the sea-salt chocolates, Hannibal leads the girls outdoors. Their neighborhood is the kind of place other people drive to, the perfect balance of wealth and holiday spirit. Every house has at least a jack-o-lantern, and Hannibal knows for a fact that the Wilsons two streets over are giving out full-size candy bars because he met Karen in the store. He says as much to his companions, who are very glad that he takes this seriously.

As befits his age and gravity, Hannibal hangs back, but when the girls need his moral support to make the dark walk to a house set back on its lot he tends to be included in the largesse, and many of the waiting parents give him a wave and a smile over the children's heads, and send them back with an extra treat for him.

Cindy and Abigail are a hit everywhere they go, since they're adorable, polite, and have obviously put forth some real effort. Cindy does the robot upon request, and her form really is excellent. Hannibal has plotted a route that solves the Traveling Salesman Problem as effectively as possible without climbing any fences, and by the time they swing around to finish the loop, Abigail's pumpkin is so full she has to stop and put a few fistfuls of candy into Hannibal's coat pocket.

“Pillowcase next year,” she says, and Hannibal grins at her.

“Ready to go on?”

“I was born ready!” Abigail yells, and Hannibal laughs as she runs ahead and then comes back for Cindy, whose boxes and foil can't take that kind of abuse.

Halloween III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Much as Bedelia loves to see Abigail having a good time, she's glad to be able to stay home. She can sip this excellent Pinot noir, nibble on her chocolates, and read 'The Turn of the Screw.' She listens for the doorbell over one of Hannibal's original compositions for theremin, playing softly in the background. She sits at the kitchen table, since it's near enough to the front door. At the first ring she sets her Kindle aside and picks up both bowls, setting the toys on the hall table before she opens the door, chocolate in hand.

There's a high school age monster waiting for her, with a cowboy about Abigail's size and a very small pumpkin. The monster is very polite, and all three are delighted with their chocolates. Bedelia wishes them a happy Halloween and steps inside again, because the night is just crisp enough to make standing around uncomfortable even in a full-coverage dress like this. She settles at the table and only reads another paragraph before the bell rings again... This time she opens the door to find a small clown with a bag full of apples, peanuts, and glow sticks, holding onto his mother's hand as she explains that he can't have sugar.

"I mean, I can buy his candy from him," she says, adjusting her fairy wings, "but little kids don't care so much about money, you know?"

"I do know," Bedelia says. "And we have an alternative." The little painted face brightens, and Bedelia smiles as she offers the bowl of toys to the boy, asking his mother what type of chocolate she prefers as the child makes his choice. He takes a bat, because they really are the best, and his mother gratefully accepts a bag of the plain dark.

"'nk you," the little boy says in his tiny voice, and Bedelia wishes both of them a happy Halloween as they make their careful way back down the steps.

The peak hours are from eight to ten o'clock, but Bedelia doesn't have time to get bored before or after. Anticipating the tastes of children, Hannibal has made more milk chocolates than any other kind, and all sorts of creatures come for them. Ghosts, her fellow witches, superheroes and cartoon characters, princesses and black cats and stupid joke costumes. There are a few angels, a demon or two, and of course, all of Star Wars characters.

The levels of effort as are diverse as the costumes themselves, from wearable works of art to the tween boys who are too cool to do more than throw on a hockey mask or a little fake fur. A group of three of them take forever to make their selection, all the better to ogle Bedelia as she holds the bowl. Still, they look her in the eye to say thank you, so she doesn't mind them too much. Watching them run off, Bedelia wonders if Will is handing out candy tonight and getting checked out by twelve-year-olds in his turn, or if he's drinking with Beverly Katz again. The thought makes her smile.

Much later, Bedelia gets an answer to her question. At a quarter after midnight, Hannibal texts to say that he and the girls are on their way home, and Bedelia acknowledges receipt of

it before pouring another glass of wine and looking at the nearly-emptied bowls with quiet satisfaction. There are enough children with health conscious parents, cavities, or a simple preference for toys over candy that there are only five of the little wind-up creatures left, and Bedelia is just thinking that it could be much worse, when the doorbell rings again.

When Bedelia opens the door, Will and Beverly are standing on the mat with an adorably chubby little tiger, a group of at least half a dozen dogs arrayed behind them, sitting politely on the porch.

"Trick or treat!" the tiger demands, holding up a gift bag that's close to overflowing with candy. Bedelia laughs, and offers her the chocolates, looking up at the adults as she does.

"Having a pleasant evening?"

"We are," Will says, and Bedelia smiles. He looks a little self-conscious in his enormous black cloak, but as far as Bedelia is concerned, it suits him. Beverly's face is painted skeleton black and white, and she's wearing the standard suit of bones, complete with gloves and hood.

"It's late," Bedelia says, "but would you like to step in for a drink?"

Beverly grins. "My sister was dumb enough to say we could go 'til Mickey got tired, and she never does."

Mickey takes the last of the white chocolate and crams it into her bag. "Thank you!" she bellows, smiling so widely that her eyes almost disappear in the roundness of her cheeks. Bedelia smiles back.

"Hey, Mick," Beverly says, "do you mind if we go in for a bit?"

"Will you look at some of my candy so I can eat it, Auntie?"

"Yep," Beverly says, and Mickey heads right past Bedelia into the house. She laughs, and so does Beverly as she follows Mickey.

"The children of the night can stay on the porch if you prefer," Will says, hesitating on the threshold. Bedelia can't help but think of vampire lore, how they have to be invited into a home.

"They can come in," she says. "I trust that they're well-mannered."

Will bows slightly, and makes a little clicking noise with his tongue that makes the dogs walk neatly behind him and into the house. Once there, another little click and a gesture tell the whole pack to sit politely at the edge of the kitchen while the humans gather around the table and Bedelia pours wine for her guests, glad to have enough left to do this without robbing poor Hannibal.

As they discuss the night and Beverly inspects a few treats for Mickey, (which turns out to be short for Michelle) Bedelia studies her guests. This is her chance to figure out what kind of connection Will and Beverly have, and she savors it almost as much as the wine.

Chapter End Notes

A whole bunch of changes weren't saved and I had to cobble this back together from imperfect memory while tired, so if this chapter isn't up to standard, that's why.

Halloween IV

Will had intended to spend the night rereading 'The Halloween Tree,' with a bowl of peanut butter cups in case some intrepid kid wandered through the fields to his house. Peanut butter cups are his personal favorite, so being left with a massive surplus isn't really a problem. Then Beverly had called him to help her take Mickey trick-or-treating, and yes, the candy is some inducement, but the real benefit to helping Beverly with her little cousins and niblings is the grateful largesse of her mother, who bestows delicious home cooking upon all those who are kind to her grandchildren.

The effort of slapping together a vampire costume would be more than amply repaid with a Tupperware of excellent namul and galbi, but it's also a nice walk for the dogs in the company of two people who don't bother Will at all. He also likes to check out the variety of costumes on display, and every responsible adult on the street is another reason for the bigger kids to refrain from bullying the younger. And from smashing jack-o-lanterns, which people put so much effort into.

Early on the night Beverly had said that Mickey never gets tired, and Will hadn't realized how true it is. The kid is still going strong at midnight, and all the dogs are beaming and wagging their tails because they've been walking for hours in a carnival atmosphere and being patted by friendly strangers and probably literally could not be happier.

Even if Mickey isn't tired, at midnight they start looping back toward the place where Beverly parked. Mickey is one of many children who leave their own sparse neighborhoods to trick-or-treat here, and she is determined to make the most of the time she has left. Many of the houses are winding down now, but everyone can find at least a spare Hershey's kiss for a tiny tiger. Eyes alight, she runs right up the steps of an elegant house with a goddamn skull-shaped topiary out front and an enormous and elaborate jack-o-lantern on each side of the door.

Mickey presses the doorbell as Will and Beverly follow her up the stairs, the dogs trotting after them. When Bedelia answers the door, it feels dreamlike and also inevitable, because of course the Lecter-Du Mauriers have a shrub clipped into the shape of a skull for Halloween.

"Having a pleasant evening?" she asks, holding out a bowl with five little bags of chocolates rattling around the bottom.

"We are," Will tells her, and she smiles.

He shuffles his feet a little, feeling like a complete dork in his lame costume of black cape, pallid makeup, and blood smears around the mouth. Her witch costume is also simple, but classic instead of hackneyed, and her dress is probably real silk, clinging to every curve. When Bedelia invites them in for a drink he nearly swallows his tongue, and the dogs are ecstatic to be allowed to come with them.

Bedelia pours three small glasses of red wine while the pack settle at the edge of the kitchen. Mickey watches as Beverly looks over her candy, and Bedelia smiles at Will, handing him his

glass.

"I was wondering what you doing, earlier," she says, and Will feels a weird flush of adolescent self-consciousness in the knowledge that she was thinking about him at all. "I wouldn't have expected you to be out."

"I'm usually not," he says, and takes a sip of the wine, pleasantly surprised at how good it is.

"But my sister didn't have the energy to keep up with Mickey this year," Beverly says, pushing a few candies over to the kid, who gleefully unwraps a Laffy Taffy and crams it into her mouth, "and if it was going to be my job, I thought Will would be good company."

"I see," Bedelia says. "My husband is doing the same for our daughter's friend, this year. Her mother has had a lot to deal with at work, and their youngest isn't two yet, so of course they're exhausted."

They sip the dark, rich wine slowly, learning all about Bedelia's favorite horror films and how Hannibal made the chocolates as they share the last bag of dark with sea salt. Mickey opts to save her own white ones for later, which may mean the drive home since they come pre-inspected.

Just as they're each accepting a tiny splash more of wine, the door opens. Will can't help jumping a little, and the dogs pick up on his anxiety, standing up and then immediately relaxing again as Abigail comes in, followed by her friend and Hannibal.

Bedelia smiles, standing and greeting her husband with a kiss, the wide brim of her hat obscuring their faces for a moment before she pulls back to ask the children how they did this year. The answer is 'excellent,' and Hannibal hauls fistful after fistful of candy out of his coat pockets. Apparently the left breast pocket holds his share, but all the rest is Abigail's, her plastic pumpkin crammed to the brim.

Mickey is about two years younger than Abigail and Cindy, which turns out to be the robot's name, but that isn't such a vast gap, especially with candy to count and dogs to pet, and soon the three are chattering away as Hannibal makes sure that everything Abigail and Cindy eat is wrapped and Bedelia pours him the last of the wine, which adds up to a generous glass.

"Thank you, beloved," he purrs when he can take it up at last. There's something really distracting about the line of his throat as he swallows, and Will stares into his own glass, wondering when the fuck he turned sixteen again.

It's almost one in the morning by the time they leave, and even Mickey is starting to yawn. She falls asleep in the back seat on the way to her house, and once Beverly is sure of that, she says, "Will, they're totally cruising you."

"...You think?" He still isn't sure what to think, and doesn't want to make an ass of himself.

"I know. I think the look Hannibal gave you is illegal in thirty-seven states."

Thanksgiving

Coming home to find her teacher there is a little weird, but he's a cool teacher and he has seven dogs, which is just amazing. Mrs. Katz is there too, and her niece is pretty cool for a little kid. By the time everyone leaves, Abigail is barely awake. Too tired to ride along, she just hugs Dad before he takes Cindy home. Technically it's his turn to read to her, but she's so tired it doesn't matter, and Mom just sings something in Italian while Abigail gets comfortable.

In the morning, the whole house smells like bacon, and she can hear scary music from downstairs, which probably means that Mom is watching the last of this year's selection horror movies. She picks seven every Halloween, and usually has to watch some of them on November first. Abigail doesn't really mind the ones with monsters, because monsters are just big scary animals, but ghosts and zombies are scary, and of course she hates anything where crazy men kill people with knives.

"Mom?" she calls from the top of the stairs, and the music stops.

"Come down and have breakfast, dear," Mom calls back, "I can finish this later."

Dad has made pumpkin pancakes with bacon and eggs, and Abigail eats three helpings before helping Dad clean up and starting on the rest of her homework. Throughout the day she nibbles on Halloween candy, and when Monday comes she takes some along to have for dessert. Almost everyone else does the same thing, and there's a lot of trading at lunch.

School always seems to speed up a bit after Halloween. Maybe it's having candy every day for so long, or hitting her stride with schoolwork again. It definitely helps to have a teacher that actually cares whether or not he's being boring. They get to draw a lot of pictures and do a lot of science experiments, and even for math they get to look at pretty seashells and other things that are symmetrical.

It's getting colder and colder outside, and Abigail starts doubling her scarves, wrapping one that's winter weight over the purely cosmetic one every recess. There's still no snow, but it's only a matter of time, and the puddles are frozen over in the morning, so Abigail can jump on them with both rubber boots to crack the clear surface.

The week before Thanksgiving break, Abigail wakes up to find the whole world covered in white. She squeals with delight, and runs downstairs. Dad smiles when he sees her, and gives her a cup of hot chocolate. He makes oatmeal and link sausage, because he says they're warming. Abigail doesn't know about that, but she likes both of them, and it's always fun to watch Mom pour an elegant swirl of rose hip syrup onto her bowl. Abigail uses maple, but only because it goes better with sausage.

Mom drives off carefully through the snow, and Dad insists on starting earlier. He and Mom both have all-weather tires, but not everyone else does, and they get stuck behind someone going twenty miles an hour for a long time, even though the speed limit is forty. Abigail guesses she can't really blame them, with so many cars in the ditch.

Of course, for kids, this is awesome. Abigail spends the whole first recess building a snow fort with Cindy, and it's still there when they come back out for the second one. They hide out in it, pretending to be snow monsters and plotting to eat everyone.

By the time Thanksgiving comes, there's about eight inches of snow on the ground, enough for Abigail to build a snow monster in the front yard. It has long sticks for teeth and claws, and when Uncle Rick catches a glance of it in the shadows on his way in for dinner, he nearly jumps out of his skin while Aunt Freddie laughs at him. They're not really Abigail's uncle and aunt, but since all she has is the two aunts on Dad's side, she figures she's allowed to adopt some extended family.

Aunt Freddie gives Abigail a high-five and Uncle Rick scolds her, but he doesn't really mean it, and proves that by taking her hand and giving it a squeeze as they walk inside. They go slowly, since cold weather makes Rick stiffer. He has a scary story and a big scar too, and Abigail is always extra nice to him when it acts up. Bad as hers is, at least it never hurts anymore.

Dad has been cooking all day, of course, so the house smells amazing. Mr. Stammets, Mr. Dolarhyde, and Ms. McClane are already here, sitting around in the living room and talking about nocturnal animals while Mom makes the centerpiece even prettier and Aunt Mischa helps Dad with dinner. Aunt Chiyoh should be here, but she's in Japan, dealing with some Murasaki business. At least Great-Aunt Tsugumi will give her lots of nice dinners, if she has to miss this one.

Abigail hugs Mom on her way into the kitchen, where Dad is shaking French-fried onions onto the green bean casserole that he only makes because Abigail wants it. Aunt Mischa is wiping off the big white platter, and smiles at Abigail.

"Have the Freds joined us as last?" she asks, and Abigail giggles.

"Yep!" It's so silly that they have almost the same name, and she can't believe that nobody called him Rick before she started doing it.

Dad puts the casserole back in the oven and then presses a kiss to her forehead while Aunt Mischa bastes the turkey. Abigail hugs him tightly, and does the same to Aunt Mischa as soon as the oven door is closed. Everything is so close to done that she starts carrying things like butter and salt and pepper to the table while Mom pours wine and all the other grownups make their way over.

Like he does every year, Dad says that he's most thankful that they're all together and have plenty to eat. He cuts the turkey into perfect little slices as they pass the other dishes around. Ms. McClane gives Mr. Dolarhyde clock directions as he helps her to what she wants, dabbing mashed potatoes at twelve o'clock and sauteed mushrooms at one.

Thanksgiving II

Thanksgiving is one of Hannibal's favorite holidays, because he can give free rein to his talents and his urge to feed the people he loves. And the people he puts up with, like Frederick Chilton, who had just had to ruin years of pointed and not always cordial dislike by being kind to Abigail. In the glow of candlelight and Bedelia's regard, he's really almost beautiful, and Hannibal is mostly resigned to his being part of the family. And naturally, where he is, Freddie Lounds must be. They actually make a rather touching couple, in their slightly mustelid way.

Having Eldon here is really something like community service. Pleasant and voluntary community service, certainly, but there is still that solicitousness that comes with inviting someone specifically to keep them from being alone. He spares a thought for Will Graham as he helps Abigail to more stuffing, hoping that he has somewhere to be. Thanksgiving isn't as bad as Christmas can be, since only close to ubiquitous tradition is a large meal, something that can always be found in this country. Whether it's accessible or even edible is another matter, but unless one actively prefers solitude, there's usually a meal to be had somewhere.

Hannibal will have to ask Bedelia about Christmas dinner, so much harder to bear without a family to join. Of course, Will could easily have his own plans or not celebrate Christmas at all. Eldon had made no particular observation of the holiday before Hannibal had met him on a shadowed hillside in the spring, both of them illegally gathering mushrooms, but Eldon's asocial tendencies have had much freer rein than those of a man who interacts with children and their parents on a regular basis.

Reba and Francis could actually be with her family tonight, but it would have involved much more travel, and that effort is best saved for a longer visit at Christmas. Francis is still a shy boy, but any outing helps. He's slowly learning that he's not hideous, and Reba is a patient teacher. Abigail's presence helps, as always. A child's chatter is very good for men like Francis and Eldon, who so seldom know what to say.

After dinner, there is a group effort to clear the table, and everyone adjourns to various couches and armchairs, stupefied with abundance as they are every year. Once Hannibal has put away everything perishable, he goes to join them. Abigail has put on 'The Wiz,' since it's apparently seasonally appropriate and nobody here cares about football, and Hannibal settles onto the loveseat beside her. Bedelia is the only person in the house willing to move, and she does so languidly, blowing out the candles and collecting the unfinished wine.

Usually Abigail and Francis describe films for Reba, with help from Frederick and Freddie as need be, and occasional asides from Mischa, but she has this one nearly memorized and only occasionally asks for a clarification of position or action. She sings along to every song and cajoles Frederick to do the same from her spot enthroned in Francis's lap in the biggest armchair. Hannibal tries to gather up enough mental fortitude to get up and find one of his sketchbooks to capture the beautiful composition they make, but then Bedelia is cuddling up under his other arm. She kisses his cheek, and then leans forward enough to catch Abigail's eye.

"You're the Pie Marshal, Abigail," she says, and Abigail giggles and salutes.

It is the sacred duty of the Pie Marshal to remember that there are pies to eat once everyone has recovered for a while. Ever since acquiring Abigail, the task has fallen to her, though Bedelia and Hannibal have each acquitted themselves well in the past. Hannibal closes his eyes and drifts for a while. The music may be simple and trite, but Frederick's rendition of 'No Bad News' has a kind of undeniable charm.

Abigail does not invoke her status as Pie Marshal until the end of the film, but as usual, she shows wisdom beyond her years. Their guests are getting tired, but not too tired, and there's no one who can't bear the thought of at least one slice, even if Reba flatly refuses a scoop of ice cream on the grounds that she will explode.

Abigail giggles. "So that means a small slice, yeah?"

Reba grins. "Yeah."

After a careful examination of the pecan pie to find the very smallest slice, Abigail presses the edge of the glass dessert plate into Reba's hands. "The fork is on the plate and the point of the pie is toward you."

"Thanks, kiddo," Reba says, and steps aside so that Eldon can claim a larger piece. He's always the first to leave, but he can't resist pie, and lingers over it with a respectful attention that Hannibal appreciates. Abigail lingers near him, fascinated by something that Hannibal can't hear but is almost assuredly another of his many Fungus Facts.

Bedelia rests her head on his shoulder, tipsy and warm. "All right?" he asks, putting an arm around her.

"Mmhm,'" she says, and he chuckles.

True to his nature, Eldon leaves first, but the other guests follow him quickly. It's getting late, everyone is stuffed, and it's cold now and will only be getting colder until about noon tomorrow. Hannibal bestirs himself to walk the ladies out, since Freddie and Reba are both in heels and the path is icy, and is very glad to come back in after everyone has gotten safely to the relevant vehicle.

He shakes fresh snow off of his jacket and brushes it out of his hair before he joins Bedelia, Abigail, and Mischa in the kitchen, where they're making a heroic effort to get the dishes washed. Luckily for everyone involved, Bedelia has a system, and Hannibal can assist and make mulled wine at the same time. The rich, spicy-sweet scent fills the kitchen, and as always, he warms some apple juice with the same spices for Abigail.

Movie Night

It seems silly to wake a child to put her to bed, but Abigail is too big to carry, hasn't brushed her teeth, and her neck will hurt in the morning if she stays where she is. Bedelia gently shakes her until she yawns and shuffles to her feet. Usually she would want a snack since dinner started so early, but tonight she's is almost bloated, sleepy and stuffed as she staggers through her nightly routine.

Abigail's dear Aunt Mischa isn't much better, lying on the couch like a beached whale or a python just after eating a goat. She's a lot like her brother that way, and Bedelia is touched to see the way he strokes her hair before waking her, getting her back up to the guest bedroom as Bedelia herds Abigail through her nightly routine.

This is no night for the Happy Hamster Hop, and Abigail knows it. She picks Goodnight, Moon, from her collection of very soothing books meant for much younger children, and nestles down into her pillows with her plush rabbit to listen, eyes closed as soon as Bedelia begins. In the early days, these books were instrumental in soothing her down from frequent nightmares. Now, Bedelia smiles to see her so calm and comfortable.

Even though Abigail is probably asleep from about the halfway point on, Bedelia reads the whole book before shutting it and tucking it away again. She presses a light kiss to Abigail's forehead, and then switches off the light, tiptoeing out. She still has a few entries left in this year's Halloween film festival, and now that Abigail is tucked in, she can fetch the mulled wine and join Hannibal in their bed. As he so often does, he has foreseen her requirements and has moved to meet them, arranging things for best viewing from the bed, and stacking Bedelia's DVDs beside it.

"I'm glad I married you," she informs him, and sets the wine down, changing into a nightgown as Hannibal picks up the DVDs.

He chuckles. "Do you want 'Eyes of Laura Mars,' or 'Night Warning', joy of my heart?"

"Laura Mars," Bedelia says. She has seen it before, and will be able to kiss Hannibal without missing anything important. She crawls into bed and pours wine for both of them. It's still warm, because Hannibal always puts it in a teapot, complete with cozy. He clinks his glass to Bedelia's, and she settles back into his arms, both of them propped up on pillows. As Barbra Streisand belts *Prisoner*, Bedelia takes a sip of wine and kisses the side of Hannibal's neck, enjoying the way they taste together.

Hannibal shudders. "I thought you wanted to actually watch this film," he purrs, his accent thick like it is first thing in the morning.

"Well," Bedelia mumbles, kissing him again, "I did say I wanted the one I had seen before." Hannibal growls softly, setting his cup aside to tilt her chin up and kiss her. She melts into it, but can't help startling at the first musical sting. Hannibal chuckles, his hand wrapping loosely around her throat to feel her pulse and her quickening breath. They both enjoy her fear sometimes, but with Abigail in the house this is the closest they dare come to something

more alarming. Bedelia whimpers softly, leaning into Hannibal's palm and kissing the corner of his mouth.

He rubs his cheek along hers like a friendly cat, and then bites her neck, his hand and jaw squeezing gently. Onscreen, Laura wakes up and wanders through her apartment to find the victim's portrait in her own art book. Bedelia can dimly hear the onscreen phone ringing, and then bursting flashbulbs as a hostile press bombards Laura with questions, but none of these things matter with Hannibal tenderly nibbling the rim of her ear., his thumb caressing her pulse. He murmurs to her in Italian, one hand creeping slowly under her skirt, the thin white material pooling on his wrist.

Hannibal has a way of teasing Bedelia that is so insidiously slow that it always works. He caresses her everywhere except where she's so hard and so wet, and by the time the murders begin in earnest, she's whimpering quietly, hips chasing his hand. He chuckles, gripping her throat with the other hand and squeezing gently. Bedelia gasps, gazing up into his eyes, so dark and full of so much affection.

He kisses her and slides two fingers into her at the same time, making her bite back a cry. They've already agreed on what they'll say if Abigail walks in on them and how they might have to modify it if she finds them in the middle of anything kinky, but there's no sense in putting it to the test before they have to.

Hannibal growls, squeezing much harder for just a moment and then relenting, kissing Bedelia again and swallowing her moans as he works her expertly, still not touching her clit. She whines and tilts her hips, struggling for contact as his grip on her throat tightens again. She shudders and then struggles not to cry out as as Hannibal pulls back and then pushes in again with all four fingers, almost too much and thereby perfect. Bedelia fucks herself on them, shoving her nightgown up to her chest so that she can weigh each breast in her hands, pinching her own nipples as Hannibal fucks her with his fingers and holds her down with his grip on her throat. It's controlled, tender brutality, and it's perfect.

Once Hannibal finally starts making quick circles on her clit with his thumb, it's all over in a few minutes. Bedelia wraps her arms around Hannibal and clings to him as he takes her over the edge and muffles her moan with a kiss. She shudders in his arms for a long moment, and then subsides, watching him suck the slickness from his fingers. He ranges over her and pushes inside her right at the tragic ending, and the timing makes Bedelia laugh, tightening around Hannibal and drawing a deep rumble of satisfaction up from his chest as he starts to move.

Thanksgiving III

The thing about Thanksgiving break is that Morgan and her mothers are far enough away to make it a bit short for the trip. Will could do it, but he wouldn't have enough time to recover and it would mean boarding the dogs when he already has to do that after Christmas on the alternate years, when Morgan spends Christmas at home. Morgan's school starts its winter break earlier, so on years like this one she can visit Will and then return home with him just after the New Year.

The only drawback to the plan is that she has to hang around a school during her break, but she assures him that it's much different when she's allowed to text her friends and only has to be quiet enough to let the other kids work. Every class is a little leery of her as the Teacher's Kid, but Morgan takes it in stride and all jealousy of her freedom is mitigated by the fact that she's expected back right after New Year, rather than a week after.

These matters of scheduling and distance don't mean that Will has to find Thanksgiving dinner for one somewhere, however. Besides the dogs, Dad always makes his way up to the frozen north to share a meal with Will and to catch up with the pack. He has three dogs of his own, and they're good friends with all of Will's.

Throughout Will's childhood, Thanksgiving meant deli food with Dad, so even though he knows how to make most of the dishes, he buys almost everything. Right after making his Wednesday night purchases, Will has to go to the airport to fetch his father. Dad always tells him not to bother, that he'll just take a cab, and every year Will retorts that he's old and traveling with pets and just what kind of an asshole does he think he raised, anyway?

As usual, by the time he pulls up, Dad is standing on the corner. He looks the same every year, lines on his face a little deeper, but that's all, now that silver has completely conquered his dark hair. He always wears the same shabby old coat, and Clementine always sits beside him, a calm, black wedge of dog, while he holds Ghost's tiny white form in his arms. Templeton has to stay in his travel kennel, occasionally letting out an irritated, squeaky little bark, which he does when Will pulls up.

"Hush," Dad says, and lets him out. Templeton frisks and leaps at the sight of Will, and Clementine wags and grins, getting to her feet as Ghost wiggles so frantically that Dad has to set her on the back seat before she can hurt herself. Will pets them all and gives each one a small treat even as Dad grumbles about spoiling them, and then helps Dad to break down the kennels. He only has one bag, and swings it into the back seat beside the dogs, who are of course delighted to be off the plane.

There's no hugging because Dad doesn't like hugs, but he looks Will right in the eye a couple times and tells him all about his current projects, which is just as good. The strangest thing about having him around is how strange it isn't, and Will's dogs seem to agree, charging out to greet them and then leaping and bounding in the joy of their beloved grandpa being here. He makes quiet noises at them and pats each one in turn, Clementine, Ghost, and Templeton frisking around in circles with their friends.

As he does every year, Will has set up the upstairs bedroom for Dad, and carries his bag up while he stands on the porch and watches the dogs, looking like part of the landscape. Clementine, Ghost, and Templeton have their own beds, and Will hauls them out of the closet, putting them in the usual spots before running his hand over the top blanket to make sure it's not pilling. Dad can't *stand* the texture, and will sleep in the armchair with all his clothes on rather than deal with it. This blanket is probably safe for another year, though, and with a last look around, Will heads back downstairs.

Dad smiles at him, in the middle of making a peanut butter sandwich, his traditional no-effort pre-Thanksgiving meal. "You want one?" he asks, and Will has to smile.

"Sure," he says, and checks on the turkeys, glad to find them nearly thawed. Not only is the institutional-grade taste of the premade dishes comforting, buying everything gives him more time to roast two turkeys, the second one for the dogs. He'll get an early start tomorrow, but for now he just sits and has a peanut butter sandwich and a glass of milk with his dad like he's eight years old again. It's soothing.

Dad drives a lot people crazy with all the not-talking he does, but Will doesn't mind spending Thanksgiving day tying flies in a friendly silence informed by the small noises of of ten dogs. It's snowing, so they're happy to sprawl beside the fire while they watch Will and Dad work. He wonders sometimes if this kind of thing is why Mom left, but he's comfortable this way. The dogs certainly have no complaints, and the house is calm and warm against the wind and snow outside. Every year, Will is thankful.

"Drink?" Will asks, his first word since about eight this morning.

"Whiskey," Dad agrees, not even looking up.

Will grins, getting up and rolling his knuckles along Dad's shoulder, an affectionate gesture that he likes a lot more than a hug. The more energetic of the dogs follow him to the kitchen, gazing hopefully at him as he checks on the turkeys, and he chuckles.

"Not yet, guys." He hasn't even started their stewed pumpkin yet, so they'll just have to suffer a while longer. They take it with philosophical resignation, and follow him back to the fire, flopping onto the floor with gusty canine sighs. Dad accepts his glass with a nod of thanks, and gently clinks the rim to Will's.

"Another year," he says, in his quiet, husky voice, and Will smiles at him.

"Another year," Will says, and Dad smiles back. The whiskey burns doing down, and then settles into a glow that matches the fire.

Hospitality

Abigail always likes the weekend after Thanksgiving. Dad makes turkey everything and Mom uses Abigail's hair to practice fancy braids while they watch movies that are scary but not too scary, like *Return to Oz*, which is almost too scary, especially in the hall with all the heads in glass cases. The Wheelers don't worry her at all. Mom would be really good at tricking them into rolling onto the sand, and Dad could probably tie their long legs into knots. When she tells him so over turkey soup, they both laugh, but not like they're laughing *at* her.

"That's a very good assessment of your parents's capabilities, Abigail," Dad says, and Mom smiles, pouring herself a little more wine. She can have it with lunch on days when she doesn't work and Abigail doesn't have school. She's usually still pretty clear even after dinner, but sometimes she gets sleepy or a little silly.

Abigail takes another cheese biscuit and nibbles it as she ponders the skill set of their Thanksgiving guests. "I guess Ms. McClane might be in danger because the place in the movie is so echoey." Even though she's really good at hiding, she might not know which way to go, but Mr. Dolarhyde would protect her.

Dad must be thinking the same, because he says, "I'm sure that if Francis were with her she wouldn't have much to worry about."

It's probably the resemblance between the kind of lost look Mr. Dolarhyde and Mr. Graham both have sometimes that makes her ask, "Can I invite Mr. Graham to Christmas Eve dinner if he doesn't have anywhere else to go?"

Dad blinks at her, and she can't tell if it's because he thinks this is a bad idea, or just doesn't follow the topic shift. "He would certainly be welcome to share our festive board," Dad says, and Abigail rolls her eyes the way she does when he talks like that.

Mom chuckles, swirling the pretty golden wine in her glass. "I hope he has plans of his own, but I'd be pleased to see him."

Abigail nods, because she feels the same way. It's sad when people have no one to spend Christmas with. Or Hanukkah, but even if Mr. Graham does Hanukkah, he'd probably still appreciate a free meal. Abigail keeps this in mind over the remainder of the break, and resolves to ask him first thing on the morning school starts again.

The morning in question is a cold one, and Dad bundles her up to the eyeballs like she's a friggin baby, but she's glad of it as they walk across the parking lot, their breath streaming away in white clouds.

When they get to the classroom, she sees that the animal cages are empty and forgets to ask anything but, "Are the animals okay?"

Mr. Graham smiles at her, looking up from the papers on his desk. "They are, but it's cold out for snakes and birds, and Algernon doesn't like being here without them."

She grins, unwrapping her big, fluffy white scarf and making sure the silky violet one is still in place. "Oh, okay," she says, ducking into the coatroom to put everything away as Dad talks to Mr. Graham.

She hopes that he doesn't extend the invitation when she's not around to see how Mr. Graham takes it, and comes scurrying back out again as soon as possible. They're still just talking, though, Mr. Graham telling Dad about his dad came up from Florida to spend Thanksgiving with him, which is great. He won't be here for Christmas, though.

"Mr. Graham?" Abigail asks, and he looks over at her with that brief, friendly smile of his, so unlike the fixed, fake ones therapists and nice church ladies always used to give her. She smiles back. "I asked Mom and Dad, and they said that you can come for Christmas dinner, if you want."

He looks a little surprised, and maybe even a little... not mad, something else, one of those weird grownup things that's all in the eyes. He glances over at Dad, and then looks back at Abigail, smiling again even if his eyes are still doing whatever that is. At least it doesn't look like it hurts.

"It's a really sweet even to think to ask me," he says, "but I always spend Christmas with my daughter."

"Oh, okay! I'm just glad you have somewhere to go. How old is she?"

Mr. Graham chuckles. "About your age. Her break is earlier, so she comes here for the first part, and then I bring her home to her moms and stay a while."

Abigail is fascinated by this information, and wishes she had time to ask him more about his daughter. It's weird, how you can never tell who's going to understand kids by who has them. She's still thinking about it when Dad leaves, and studies Mr. Graham as the bell rings and everyone files in. She wonders what happened, if there was a sad divorce or some kind of agreement. Mom and Dad had explained awhile ago about how some girls like girls and some boys like boys but that it takes once of each to make a baby, and Abigail knows one kid who has two dads and a mom that's more like his aunt.

She hopes it's like that, and that Mr. Graham didn't get left or cheated on. She continues thinking of these matters through English and Math, until Mr. Graham calls on her and she has to ask for the question again, which always makes her feel dumb. At least he's nice about it. Mr. Graham doesn't mind so much if you don't pay attention as long as you can answer questions, and Abigail knows perfectly well how to figure out how many times three goes into forty-two.

Snowy Tuesday

It does make Hannibal a little sad to think that he won't be able to ply Will with roast goose and eggnog, but like Abigail, he's pleased to hear that Will will be with family. And interested to hear of their existence. At least if the child has two mothers and lives elsewhere, Will is probably, at worst, actively trying to get over one of them.

He poses the question to Bedelia once Abigail is in bed, and she smiles. "Darling," she says, "you know as well as I do that there are all sorts of arrangements."

"Ugh, I know," Hannibal admits, flopping onto their bed and rolling like a cat. It relieves his feelings a little, and makes Bedelia laugh. She sits down beside him and slides a hand into his shirt to rub his belly as if he really is a cat.

"I think he's at least interested in our arrangement," she says, and Hannibal catches her hand, bringing it up to his mouth to kiss it.

"Your intuition is excellent," he concedes. "You restore my faith."

Bedelia chuckles, leaning down to kiss him as her hand slips lower to loosely wrap around his cock. He was barely beginning to be tumescent, but Bedelia's soft and capable hand on him brings him to full hardness within about a minute. The way he responds to Bedelia always makes him feel much younger than he is and correspondingly silly, and she smiles down at him as if she's reading his mind.

"I have great hopes for spring," she murmurs, still stroking him, and Hannibal lets himself wriggle like a puppy, feeling happier and more ridiculous by the moment.

"What do you hope, carissima?"

Bedelia smiles down at him, a slow smirk under loving eyes. "I hope to watch, of course. I hope to see him inside you and holding you down the way you like."

Hannibal can't help whimpering, and presses into her hand. "I'm glad we agree so completely," he gasps, and Bedelia chuckles, speeding up her strokes until Hannibal groans and comes all over her hand. She just quirks one eyebrow in an amused way, and slides her sticky-slick fingers into his mouth.

"Be a good boy and clean me up," she says, and Hannibal does.

Bedelia covers him in soft, idle kisses as he licks and sucks at her palm and each fingertip in turn, pressing close and telling him what a good boy he is. Hannibal wriggles a little against the mattress, and Bedelia smiles, murmuring to him in Italian and making him profoundly grateful to be alive. He mumbles happy noises around her fingers, and she nestles in against his chest with a contented sigh before getting up to wash. She comes back with a damp washcloth and cleans Hannibal up, tossing the cloth into hamper and cuddling close again, their breathing setting into the same sleeping rhythm.

In the morning Hannibal makes savory pancakes, because they're rich and warming and the temperature has dropped overnight, along with about three inches of snow. Abigail is of course delighted, and stands at the window in her pajamas until Hannibal has to remind her of the time.

It's a cozy breakfast, with Bedelia right on schedule and able to sit down with them for a little while. Long enough to eat two of the thick pancakes, which is really all that Hannibal could wish for. He helps her to pin back a stray wisp of golden hair and tells her to drive safely, kissing her goodbye at the door. He has yet another glimpse of how surreal it is for a person like him to be living this life, and then pushes it aside to make sure his daughter is ready for school.

Abigail is bright-eyed and excited about the snow, and that almost makes it worth the trouble of driving in it. Hannibal crawls along behind cowards and dodges the wobbles and spins of the foolhardy, resenting every single one with the fire that comes with having such a precious passenger. At last they make it to school, and he can consign her to someone trustworthy. It's a nice change from previous years, even if Ms. Neilson had had some real kindness under her insincere sugary crust.

It's too cold for the animals again, and Will looks a little forlorn, sitting at his desk and reading a battered copy of Watership Down. He smiles when he looks up at them, even if his eyes are a little nervous. Hannibal smiles back. Abigail calls a chipper greeting to her teacher, and then bounces into the coatroom to put her things away.

"Morning, Hannibal," Will says quietly, and Hannibal walks up the desk, studying him.

"You always seem lonely when you can't bring the animals."

"Maybe I am."

Hannibal chuckles. "Maybe you are."

Will shoots a quick glance at the coat room, and then gestures for Hannibal to lean in, which he does. "Look, there's something I need to know: did you put her up to asking me to dinner?"

"If I had I would lie about it, but no, I did not. Much as it may have gratified her parents, it was her own idea."

Will chuckles. "Thanks. And I am very grateful to be thought of. She's a sweet kid."

"She is," Hannibal says. "Though if you'll be back in town for it, you are cordially invited to the Lecter-Du Maurier New Year's Eve party."

"I'll have to keep that in mind," Will says, and then smiles at Abigail as she comes out of the coatroom to ask him about the five-paragraph essay due on the last day before the break. It's technically a bit advanced for a third-grade class, but Will is only asking for a basic three-sentence paragraph, and the topic can be almost anything that interests them. Abigail is of course writing about cats, and wants to know if 'Why Cats Are Good Pets' will work.

"Sure, it will work," Will tells her. "All you have to do is pick something with good and bad points. Cats are good pets because they're easier to leave home alone, but they're bad pets if you really hate cleaning litter boxes. That kind of thing."

Abigail nods, and goes to her desk to arrange her things, setting out last night's History worksheet and today's Current Event. Hannibal glances at the clock, and sees that it's five minutes past time for him to get out of the way.

"Good morning, Will," he says, with a little inclination of the head, and goes out, pressing a kiss to the top of Abigail's head on the way.

Art Projects

The week after Thanksgiving is often a very tedious and trying one. The holidays force so many of her patients into contact with extremely dysfunctional families that regression and meltdowns are inevitable. There are a lot of tears in Bedelia's office today, and in Hannibal's as well. Along with a few medication changes, Hannibal fields one completely exhausting and terrible revelation that forces him to shuffle appointments so the poor woman can come back tomorrow to process a little more. At least Bedelia can help with that over her lunch break, eating her bento with one hand and holding her phone with the other.

It's a profound relief to walk out of the office, the low winter sun making her early mornings worth it. It will be dark by the time Hannibal gets home, and Bedelia basks in the warm, amber light for both of them. It's a bit of a wrench to walk into the school's fluorescent-lit corridors, but on the other hand, this saves Abigail a wait in the cold and gives her a glimpse of Will.

Hannibal is right, Will does look a little forlorn without his pets. It's adorable. She smiles at him over Abigail's head as she hugs her in greeting.

"Hi, Mom!" she chirps, and Bedelia smiles down at her.

"Good afternoon, dearest. Did you have a good day?"

"Yeah! We did art! I'll show you mine in a minute," she adds, going to the coatroom. There is no regular art teacher at the school, unfortunately, but there are a few who travel the district with enormous portfolios of supplies and examples.

"Which project was it?" Bedelia asks Will, walking up to the desk. He doesn't rise, of course, but he does look up at her with a touching and badly-hidden diffidence.

"Silhouettes," he says, and pushes papers off of what must be his own example work. It's a moody, evocative piece, black construction paper in the shapes of a fish lurking behind water plants glued onto an abstract background of marine blues.

"How lovely," she says, because it's true, and Will squirms a little.

"Thanks." He looks adorably surly now, and Bedelia wishes in vain for an excuse to touch him. She has to settle for a slow, sincere smile.

"You're welcome," she says, and turns to Abigail, who has everything packed up except for her own silhouette project, carried with the back outward, to preserve the surprise.

Bedelia gives her daughter her full attention. It's easy to be enthusiastic about a beloved child's art projects, and even easier when the project in question is actually quite good. Abigail's background is a collection of vibrant rainbow swirls, and she has cut out an impressive number of cats, doing impossible and whimsical things in the night sky, like standing in the curve of a crescent moon, or batting at a star.

"Very creative," she says, studying it. "The cats are so lifelike! This is absolutely one of your best efforts."

Abigail beams at her. "Thanks! Bye, Mr. Graham!" she adds, and leads Bedelia out, explaining the creative process as she goes. Bedelia spares Will a glance over her shoulder and a wave, and he smiles.

Abigail talks about her day all the way home, and Bedelia is pleased that she had such a good one. She doesn't have much homework, but enough for Bedelia to set her up in her usual study spot with some fruit. That done, she finds a good red and lets it breathe for a while. It's one that Hannibal particularly likes, and he'll probably need it by the time he gets home.

Sure enough, Hannibal comes shuffling in like all he wants to do is collapse, which he does immediately, stretching out on the sofa. Bedelia knows exactly what to do in these situations, which is to say nothing and pour Hannibal some wine. He accepts it gratefully, taking a careful sip without raising his head from the cushion.

"Jeez, Dad," Abigail says, trotting in from the kitchen with cookies and milk, "are you okay?"

"I am, dearest," he says, "just *very* tired." He sighs as Bedelia strokes his hair, and works his way through about half of the glass before he feels strong enough to sit up and see about dinner. First he gives Bedelia the kiss that he owes her, and then goes over to press another to the top of Abigail's head before vanishing into the kitchen. The main dish is in the oven, of course, but even being a working father can't crush Hannibal's drive to make side dishes.

After making sure that Abigail is still on the right track with her math, Bedelia goes to join Hannibal. He's humming a favorite aria to himself as he assembles a cold beet salad, elegant fingers already stained pink. Bedelia smiles, drifting over to wrap her arms around his waist from behind.

"Yes, light of my eyes and companion of my heart?" he coos, and Bedelia chuckles, nuzzling his shoulder and breathing in his scent.

"I'm just here to supervise," she murmurs, her eyes hidden in his shirt.

Hannibal chuckles. "I extended an invitation to our New Year's party today."

"Dare I hope it was to Will?"

"Of course it was. He didn't positively accept, mind."

"Of course he didn't."

"There is some chance of his joining us, I think. There was no positive denial, either."

Bedelia rises onto her toes to kiss the back of his neck. "Good." She clings to Hannibal for a while longer, following his lead around the kitchen the way she does on the dance floor, and then breaks away to collect Abigail's cookie plate before settling down her to get her essay outlined. Bedelia doesn't believe in Christmas kittens as a general rule, but they may have to

see about one this year. After all, parents must make sacrifices for their children, and they would endure much worse than shed hair and shredded furniture for Abigail.

Will Is A Caring And Involved Baby-Daddy

Every time Morgan travels as an Unaccompanied Minor, Will finds himself praying to a god that he really doesn't believe in that she'll be all right. Alana always says that he worries too much, but Margot understands, and it's always a profound relief to be able to call her with the news that Morgan is here. At least there's no trouble about his gate pass this time, and Will is right there as his daughter comes walking out with a stewardess.

She's kind of a scrawny kid, but wiry, just like Will. She has his curls, too, and a pair of big eyes that are his blue, but shaped like Margot's. Now they light up when she catches sight of him. She keeps her grip on her little roll-on bag and bolts over to Will, who crouches to catch her, hugging her tightly. Pretty soon she'll be tall enough to meet him closer to level, and he's not sure if he's looking forward to it or not.

He holds Morgan for a long moment before standing up to deal with post-9/11 bureaucracy. Apparently he looks less suspicious this year, his ID verified in half the time. Maybe they've started to remember him. He takes charge of Morgan's bag as soon as he can, and follows her down to the baggage claim.

"Hey, kiddo," he says softly. "Have a good flight?"

"Yeah," Morgan says, "everyone was nice to me. And I have a big suitcase of presents, because you know Mom."

Will chuckles, because he does know Margot. Verger money has gone to so many nasty things, she can't resist using it to shower her loved ones in gifts. Morgan recounts everything about her journey as they wait for the suitcase and then drive home. She's bright-eyed and only a little tired, and she's almost as ecstatic to see the dogs as they are to see her. Will lets them have a moment of excited crowding in the driveway, but then he has to get his daughter inside where it's warm, and to feed her and make sure the guest room is set up to her liking.

By the time the kid has greeted the small animals, called her mothers, inhaled two bowls of soup, and stumbled her way to bed, the whole house feels different. The dogs know it, delighted but in a nervy kind of way. Will is pretty sure they feel responsible for Morgan, at least two of them always guarding her door at night. Tonight it's Winston and Querida, and they don't even abandon their posts at the scent of bacon the next morning, only trotting down the stairs when Morgan does.

Even if she only really has Sunday to settle in, Morgan is ready to go on Monday morning. She may be going to school on the first proper day of her vacation, but she likes Will's school, which has different books in the library, and where she can do whatever she likes, as long as it's quiet and not destructive. Today she sets herself up in the back of the room with some paper and the tub of miscellaneous coloring supplies.

Will settles at his desk, looking over the week's lesson plans. He hates to give in to anarchy, but he tries to allow for the inevitable distracting effect of a nearing holiday on a bunch of

eight-year-olds. He's making a few last adjustments when the door opens, admitting Hannibal and Abigail.

Will can see Hannibal looking at Morgan and putting two and two together, but he doesn't expect Abigail's jubilant cry of, "I know you from camp!"

Every year since she was about two, Morgan has gone to Camp Greenwater with Margot. The place is well-enough run that Margot technically doesn't have to be there, but she's almost paranoid about the staff, and insists on being on-site and getting to know everyone as well as she can, preventing turnover whenever possible. Morgan is almost a camp mascot, a fixture as the cast of traumatized and at-risk kids ebbs and flows over the six years the camp has been open. Will has actually been thinking of recommending Greenwater to the Lecter-Du Mauriers, and smiles to realize that he won't have to.

"This is an unexpected connection," Hannibal murmurs as they watch the girls eagerly catch up on everything they've done since last summer. "That was the first year Abigail felt secure enough to go," Hannibal adds, and Will nods.

"It's a good place," he says. "Her parents know what they're doing."

"You don't count yourself among their number?" Hannibal asks, in that annoyingly insightful way of his.

Will shrugs. "I don't really know what I am." As long as Morgan loves him, he doesn't really care, but that's not the kind of thing he would say to Hannibal.

"It doesn't matter what the attachment is called," Hannibal says, "as long as it's there."

By now it's nearly time for the bell, and Hannibal gracefully prowls out of the room, only pausing to take his leave of Abigail. Morgan watches him go, and then asks Abigail if her dad is always like that. Abigail just laughs. "Pretty much!" she says, and goes to her desk to arrange herself for the day as the rest of the class pours in. Everyone takes at least a glance at Morgan, but Will has told them about her in advance, so everyone settles down quickly.

At the first recess Morgan bundles up and heads out with Abigail, who's telling her all about her friends. Will hopes they get along, or at least disagree civilly, and spends an anxious twenty minutes trying and failing to read. He turns out to have nothing to worry about, everyone coming in flushed with cold and exercise, grinning like happy dogs.

Christmas Break

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Last summer Morgan had showed Abigail all over Greenwater, because it's almost another home for her, and Abigail is delighted to return the favor. Morgan knows all about the playground for the little kids, but not the one the third and fourth-graders use, and is very grateful to note the best places for building forts and sliding on the icy puddles. They spend all of the second recess sliding around with Cindy and Billy, and at the end of the day Morgan gives Abigail her phone number, because now she has one of her own, instead of very very carefully carrying her mama's for travel.

Morgan has two moms, which Abigail already knew about, and she's glad to see that the other kids take it in stride when it comes up. Some people make fun of kids for having two moms or two dads, but it can't be much weirder than having divorced parents or being adopted. Abigail just has the number written down when Mom shows up, but she doesn't mind waiting for Abigail to get her things, going up to Mr. Graham's desk and talking to him the way grownups do. Her high-heeled shoes don't bother her most days, but she's leaning on the desk a little, so maybe they are today, Abigail can't be sure.

All the way home Abigail tells Mom about Morgan and her family, and Mom listens as she makes her expert way around patches of ice. When they get home Mom gets right back to decorating, because of course every year she has to do the whole house. She does it in a very fancy, elegant way, of course. Abigail does like it, but she's always glad when the tree goes up. Christmas is another of those things that make her feel kind of homesick and correspondingly bad about it. The memories are blurry but bright, of colored lights and tinsel everywhere, and Mom's artful arrangements of real evergreens, white lights, and careful accents of gold and red are hardly anything like it. The tree isn't up yet, because Dad gets a real one every year, and that is just like Before.

Back then Mom and Dad's tree was the same as the rest of the house, but now they cover it in colored lights, things Abigail makes at school and at camp, and the glittery ornaments Abigail picked out for their first Christmas together. The topper is the same beautiful white and gold angel it always was, but Mom says that it seems to tolerate its new neighbors very well.

All week long Abigail and Cindy eat lunch with Morgan and play with her at recess. In the afternoons Mom drafts Abigail to help her with the decorations, and in the evening she helps Dad make mincemeat and candied plums. This combination is almost enough to make her miss school when it lets out, but now she gets to hang out with Aunt Freddie all day, because she works from home. Mom and Dad only take the actual week of Christmas off, and even then they take calls from patients because the holidays really stress people out.

One of the best presents arrives two days before Christmas: Aunt Chiyoh gets back from Japan. She's exhausted and jet-lagged but glad to see everyone, and Abigail tries to speak as much Japanese as she can while Aunt Chiyoh's brain shifts gears back to English. Abigail

likes her anyway, but she's invaluable right around Christmas, when Abigail's parents get so cagey and mysterious. They don't claim anything is from Santa Claus, but they do like to provide genuine surprises, something they say will be harder as she gets older, so they might as well enjoy it while they can.

The morning after Chiyoh arrives Dad is having some kind of phone conversation with Mr. Graham. Abigail knows it's Mr. Graham because he wrote his whole name on the blackboard on the first day, and Mom and Dad don't know anybody else called Will. Besides, Dad is talking in a gentle kind of way, like he does to Mr. Dolarhyde or Mr. Stammets. Well, it's a little different, but she can't place it.

"I appreciate this a great deal, Will," he says, and then laughs at whatever Mr. Graham says. "Of course. Take care of yourself."

All day long Abigail wonders about that conversation, even when Uncle Rick takes her out to help him pick a few last things because he's never prepared, and she's still wondering about it as she tries to fall asleep as fast as possible to make morning come. As always, it feels like it takes forever, but at last she closes her eyes and they stay closed until she opens them to low winter sunlight. Abigail leaps out of bed and doesn't bother with any kind of scarf, just throwing her bathrobe on over her pajamas and running downstairs. The tree shines in every color, and Mom and Dad are slouched on the couch with coffee, looking tired but happy. Aunt Chiyoh is wide awake and fully dressed, still out of synch with local time.

Every year, Abigail is the first to dig into the pile, sorting and passing the gifts. She goes to her usual position, but Mom tells her to open the big blue and silver box first. It's heavy for its size, and as she picks it up, it mews. The lid is wrapped separately, and there are air holes in it. Abigail gasps, not daring to believe it, and carefully lifts the lid. Crouched inside the box is a little black and white cat, a bit past kittenhood but not truly adult yet. It looks up at her with wide, lamp-like eyes, one yellow and one blue, and mews again. Abigail blinks at it very, very slowly, once and then again. Only after the cat blinks back does she pick it up. It purrs and waves its tail just a little bit, not in an angry way. It's very calm the whole time that Abigail looks it over and checks to see if it's male or female. She's a girl cat, and already fixed, belly fur mostly grown back. When Abigail can think of it, she thanks Mom and Dad again and again, and swears to take good care of the cat.

After she gets the litter box and food and water dishes and scratching post set up, there are other presents. They're all pretty great, but nothing beats a real live cat, especially one so cute and friendly. The whole day long, Abigail works on thank-you notes, and thinks about what to name her new pet, constantly rolling belly up on her cornflower-patterned stationary to demand affection.

Chapter End Notes

Edited for continuity, whoops. *cough*

Christmas Kitten

The holidays reveal another facet of Will's loveliness: he's willing to accompany Hannibal and Bedelia to an animal shelter on Christmas Eve, while Abigail helps Frederick with some extremely last-minute shopping. He actually does need the help, making Abigail very unsuspecting. They're also able to take Morgan's father away with her full connivance, because she knows how much her friend wants a cat, and is happy to spend an hour or two with Beverly while they go down to the shelter and start inspecting cats. It's noon, and Abigail will probably want to come home by three, so this will have to be a surgical strike.

"Kittens are too much trouble," Will says as they walk from cage to cage, "and they have the best odds."

Seniors have the worst, but Hannibal and Bedelia have already agreed that something half-grown would be best. Old enough to be a real cat sooner rather than later, but unlikely to die and leave Abigail heartbroken until she's much older. Even so, Hannibal is tempted by a calm, wise-looking old orange tabby, and almost takes her just to do a good deed, but after being assured that neither she nor her roommate will be up for euthanization any time soon, he can focus on the mission again.

"I'm remembering why I never come here," Will mutters, and Hannibal laughs.

"How many dogs do you currently have, Will?"

"Seven," he admits, looking away. Hannibal just smiles and pats his shoulder.

"I think it's very sweet," he says, and Will flushes pink. The shirt's collar is half turned in, and Hannibal gently fixes it, fingertips brushing Will's neck where the pulse is strong and a little fast. Will actually trembles, and it's all Hannibal can do to keep from smirking from ear to ear. He leads the way to the rest of the cages, where they find several cats that are about the right age. Will becomes deeply invested in learning about each one, only risking occasional sidelong glances at Hannibal, and nearly jumping out of his skin when Bedelia appears beside him unexpectedly.

"Sorry," she says in that quiet way of hers, and pats his forearm. He looks a little helpless, like her hand is some kind of beautiful and venomous wild animal that he has never before encountered. After a moment he escapes to very seriously blink at cats, still a little flushed.

"I can't stand it," Bedelia whispers to Hannibal when they're sure Will is distracted, "he's too cute."

"I know," Hannibal replies, patting her hand in sympathy.

Will is deep in conversation with one of the staffers, and emerges at last to guide them to another cage where three young cats are standing by the bars, ears up and eyes wide with curiosity about everything around them. They're adorable, and all black and white, just in different places and amounts.

"She said there were nine of them at first, and they're going on five months old," Will says, hands in his pockets as he studies the kittens. The odd-eyed one puts its paws up on the wire when Bedelia goes closer to them, and she smiles, crouching to look it in the eye. It mews, a piteous little noise, and then purrs when Bedelia strokes one of its tiny paws with her forefinger. The others are calm and friendly as well, but during a short interview, the odd-eyed one seems to particularly want to come with them.

The adoption fee is heavy, but they can afford it and the cat is already spayed, vaccinated, and used to being in a carrier. She's also in glowing health, and Hannibal is reasonably confident that she'll last a good while, provided they keep a very good watch for accidents. When they thank Will for his advice, he just laughs and shrugs.

"You guys knew the important thing already," he says.

"And what was that?" Hannibal asks.

"That you're bringing a living being into your family, not buying a toy."

"Also, we grasp that an eight-year-old is going to need some help with the responsibility," Bedelia adds, having signed all the relevant paperwork. "Please go get the carrier, mio caro," she says, and Hannibal kisses her hand and goes. All of the accoutrements are neatly packed into the trunk already, except the carrier, sitting fully-assembled in the back seat because they had the sense to bring an expert.

Loading up doesn't take long at all. The cat voluntarily gets into the carrier, and Will smiles at her. "You know you're going home, don't you?" he says softly, latching the door. He carries her out and settles into the back seat with her, since his own car is still parked at their house. This turns out to be a very good thing, because the cat reveals a flaw at last: the poor thing gets carsick. About a third of the way home, the quiet groaning starts, and a bit past the halfway point, there's a horrifically biological sound from the back seat, followed by a resigned sigh from Will.

"This leather's treated, right?" he calls over the engine.

"It is," Hannibal assures him, and Bedelia passes him a partial roll of paper towels and the whole canister of wet wipes.

"Will that be enough?"

"I think so," Will says, industriously mopping up the mess like he does this every day, thanking Bedelia for the empty pet store bag she passes back to him. All the while Will is talking softly to the kitten, which does seem to soothe her. They're just turning into the driveway when Will extracts her from the carrier to wipe her tiny face, only for her to heave again. Cat vomit does not improve his plaid shirt, and he laughs and curses quietly.

"At least it didn't get on my coat."

"Poor things," Bedelia says. "Come in with us, you can at least rinse your shirt out and borrow something of Hannibal's."

"...I don't know if I'd dare," Will says, somewhere between saucy and sincere, as always. Still, he follows them into the house, and lets Bedelia lead him to their bedroom. It's a pity that he's only there to set the kitten down so she can recover, but it's good to set a precedent.

Christmas Kitten II

Once the cat is resting in their kitten-proofed bedroom, Will sort of retracts into a little ball of bashfulness, and Bedelia is glad that he has cat vomit on his shirt, because without that bit of repulsiveness she's not positive she could be responsible for her actions.

"Give me your coat," she says. "We have an en suite." She gestures to the bathroom door, and Will nods, still looking a bit hunted.

"Thanks," he says, and sidles away to it, shutting the door behind him and locking it, the little click loud in the quiet.

Bedelia carries the coat downstairs, hanging it beside her own and Hannibal's. Her husband has brought all the cat accoutrements in, and is deeply engaged in checking all the decorations for cat safety, but he looks up the moment Bedelia steps into the room. "He seems afraid of me," she says, "but in a very conscious sort of way."

"You can be intimidating, light of my eyes," he says, and the look he gives her is as childlike in its mischief as Will's are in their shyness.

"I suppose," Bedelia says. "There's no tinsel within three feet of the ground anywhere, but keep checking." Hannibal salutes, and Bedelia smiles, collecting the cat's lighter things and taking them upstairs. She can still hear water running in the bathroom, and smiles to see the cat curiously pawing at the crack under the door.

"Now, now," Bedelia says softly, "that would be cheating."

She sets down the empty litter box and dishes on the bed along with a few toys, the litter and scratching post too heavy to bother with. There's a rubber sheet spread out on the floor, hopefully the cat will be on it if nature calls before Hannibal can haul the bag up. For now the kitten is much more interested in supervising Bedelia as she opens the closet. It's a walk-in, and the cat walks in after her, tail erect as she looks around with her blue and gold eyes.

Hannibal doesn't have much that a man like Will would be comfortable in, but he does own long-sleeved Henleys, including a worn grey one that probably won't alarm Will too much in and of itself. What the psychological effect of Hannibal's clothing on Will's skin will be, she is eager to find out. She emerges from the closet to find that she can't hear the water anymore, and smiles.

"Uh, Bedelia?" The bathroom door cracks cautiously open.

"I'm here. Trade me shirts."

She holds out the shirt and Will has to open the door wide enough to take it and to pass his wet flannel to her, the clean parts thoughtfully wrapped around the soiled area. He's skinny, but well-formed and his skin is flawless. She tries not to eye him too obviously, but he still

grabs Hannibal's shirt as fast as he politely can, and shuts the door in maidenly confusion. "Just put that in a bag," he calls through the door, "I can wash it."

"If you insist," Bedelia says, tucking it into one of the many pet store bags. "Now I need to wash my hands, though."

"Just a minute!" Will calls, and the poor boy really does sound flustered.

In much less than a minute he opens the door again, however, and Bedelia brushes by him in the tight space. If not for the huge bathtub, she'd have no excuse, and she's grateful yet again for Hannibal's hedonism. Will looks very cute in the shirt, the sleeves too long for him and the unbuttoned neckline gaping over his collar bones. He stands there on the threshold, rolling up the sleeves as Bedelia washes her hands and seeks his eyes in the mirror.

"Thanks again for your help," she says. "It means a lot to us." Will flushes bright pink, and Bedelia carefully controls her smile, switching off the water and turning to face him.

"Y-you're welcome," Will stammers, and doesn't back up as Bedelia slowly and deliberately steps into his space, close and then closer, until she really has to look up at him, almost close enough to kiss. He smells like Hannibal's sandalwood soap, and his hairline is damp, like he splashed his face during his ablutions. His wide eyes are very blue, with a few brown-gold striations.

"Is the shirt comfortable?" She straightens the neckline lazily, and fastens the first of the four buttons as though she has all the time in the world.

"Y-y-yes." Will bites his lip as her fingertips brush his skin, and now Bedelia lets herself smile, slow and lazy.

She turns her attention to the last two buttons and just has them done when Will hears Hannibal up the stairs and jumps, appropriately enough, like a scalded cat. The actual feline eyes him with alarm, and vanishes under the bed when Hannibal comes in, bearing the litter and the scratching post. Will looks from to Bedelia and back again so helplessly that it's almost funny, but the need to reassure Will overpowers the comedic element.

"It's all right, Will," Hannibal says, setting his burdens down.

"And just what is this?" Will asks, still tensed for flight.

"Nothing, if you want it to be," Hannibal says. "Bedelia, have you been alarming this young man?"

"That's one word for it," Will mutters, more flushed than ever.

Right as this crucial moment, Hannibal's phone rings. He rolls his eyes heavenward. "I have to take this call, excuse me." He steps out into the hallway and Will relaxes a little, looking simultaneously affronted and relieved.

"It's from the friend who's occupying Abigail right now," she says, which washes the resentment out of his body language in a moment. "Was I alarming you?" Bedelia asks, and

Will laughs, nervously rubbing at his stubble.

"A bit, but beautiful women always make me nervous."

Bedelia sits down on the edge of the bed, and gestures for Will to join her. "I would rather work toward a solution than exacerbate the problem."

Will settles next to her, looking less flustered and a little amused. "It's not always a bad nervous," he says, and Bedelia has to laugh. The cat comes prowling out from under the bed, and Will makes a little clicking noise at her. She hops up onto the bed and purrs thunderously as Will pets her, soothing the cat and himself at the same time.

"Just stall, Frederick!" comes Hannibal's voice from outside, "Twenty minutes would be princely, buy the child an ice cream or something."

Christmas Kitten III

Will cracks up at the revelation that his student is actually out getting ice cream while her parents get up to... something. If they want a human sex toy, they can go to hell, but Will is too busy trying to snicker quietly to worry about anything. He feels like he might rupture something, but finally gets it under control just in time for Hannibal to come back in.

"We have a lead time of twenty minutes," he tells them, sitting on Will's other side and absently stroking the cat. "I am not a cuckolded husband in the traditional or fetish sense, but Bedelia and I both find you remarkably attractive. We've restrained our active advances because Abigail is still in your class, but it has been difficult."

Will covers his face with his hands, taking deep breaths. "...Will?" Bedelia asks, and he shudders.

"I... You're both gorgeous. I didn't know if I was misreading you or if you were just teasing me or what, but...." he shrugs, and manages to lift his face and risk a glance at each of them in turn. There's an avid gleam in both their eyes, but their expressions are gentle as they wait for Will to find the rest of his words. "I'm not very good at this kind of thing," he admits, and Hannibal pats his shoulder, his hand broad and warm through the thin fabric of his shirt on Will's back. Will lets himself really feel that hand, and his face goes hot again. "If you're not joking, we could try to be something. Maybe friends with benefits, maybe more. And if the maybe more worries you, I'm not sure I can handle that."

"It doesn't worry me," Hannibal says softly, and takes Will's hand, lacing their fingers together.

"Okay," Will whispers, his throat tight. Bedelia takes his other hand and he feels how small hers is, how dainty. Her fingers slip between his, and he swallows hard.

"May we kiss you?" Hannibal murmurs, low and insinuating.

"I'm off the clock," Will mutters, as much to himself as to them. He looks straight ahead, not up to eye contact right now.

"Precisely," Hannibal says, "but it doesn't answer my question."

"Yes," Will grumbles, sounding much less enthusiastic than he meant to. "'I mean, please," he whispers. Neither of them says a word, and then Hannibal has a gentle hand on Will's jaw, guiding his head around. This close Hannibal's bright-brown eyes look almost red, and Will shivers. Hannibal kisses him slowly and tenderly, cupping Will's head in both hands and making him melt. When Hannibal pulls back, Bedelia takes over, turning Will the same way and gently pulling him down. Her mouth is smaller and softer of course, but there's a similar sense of tightly-controlled power, and Will pulls away first, breathless.

"I need to go," he says, standing up.

"You do," Hannibal says, in a dismal, longing sort of way.

"I, uh... I'm just nervous, not really afraid, okay? I'll see you later." He picks up his bagged shirt and fends off the cat with one foot as she tries to take advantage of the opening door. Once all is secure, he flees into the bright winter afternoon. He has to sit in his car for a long moment until he's steady enough to drive, torn between terror and exhilaration.

By the time he pulls up to Beverly's house, he's mostly in order, and really feels quite stable until he hangs up his coat. "When did you change your shirt?" Morgan asks, and Will does his best not to swallow his own tongue.

"The cat was sick on me, this belongs to Abigail's dad." He tells them all about the cat, and somehow manages to keep a straight face until Morgan has to go to the bathroom and Beverly takes the opportunity to drag Will into the kitchen to demand the rest of the story. When he gets to the part where both of them kissed him, she has to cover her own mouth to keep back one of those delighted shrieks women do.

"Oh my god that's incredible," she whisper-yells, and has to do a few spins on the tile to relieve her feelings.

"So what should I do?" Will asks when she's calmer, and she bursts into laughter.

"You should do both of them, silly!" She takes a deep breath and struggles for self-control. "Okay, okay, in all seriousness, you should go their New Year's party and see what happens."

"Duly noted," Will says, and they're talking about Morgan-appropriate subjects by the time she gets back. They part now, only to regroup at the Katz family Christmas dinner, which they're perpetually invited to. It means more driving, but Will is glad for the chance to actually launder his shirt and to take the dogs and Morgan on another walk. It always helps him collect himself before facing the sheer numbers of the Katz clan.

Margot being the person she is, she always sends something for every single Katz, and Will admires her generosity just as much as he hates having to make sure he has everything and that none of the labels have come off. At least Morgan loves adorning them with ribbons and bows, touches that Margot skips when the boxes have to travel as checked baggage. Apparently this year everyone gets botanical soaps that look like jellied swamp water and smell like heaven. Morgan piles them into a gift bag, and changes from overalls to a simple, wine-colored dress that makes her look even more like Margot than usual. But she's chirpy in a way that Margot had had beaten out of her by this age, and Will loves her so much that it breaks his heart.

"You okay, Dad?" she asks, and he smiles.

"Yeah. Come on, we don't want to be late."

"Nope!" she sings out, and hops down the front stairs as Will locks the door behind them and gives the dogs a last command to be good.

Boxing Day

Aunt Mischa tries to take time off around Christmas like anybody else, but this year some people had a bad accident on their way to spend Christmas Eve with relatives, and Aunt Mischa had had to go in and fix the mom, who had gotten in the way of the kids getting hurt bad enough to need fixing. It took a long time, and Aunt Mischa spends Christmas Day sleeping off her hard work, so she doesn't get to meet Luna until Boxing Day, when she comes over for breakfast and to open her presents. While the grownups are talking everything over the way they do, Abigail calls Morgan, because Dad said she could even though it counts as long distance.

Morgan answers right away, and she already knows about Luna because Mr. Graham helped Mom and Dad pick her out! Still, she doesn't know that her name is Luna, or that Abigail is already teaching her to stand up on her hind paws, so Abigail still has plenty to tell. Morgan is also fascinated by Abigail's reports of the food, because she has Asian food every Christmas, whoever she spends it with.

"Mama doesn't really believe anything," Morgan says, "but she was raised Jewish, and so they always had Chinese food for Christmas because it was the only thing open and Grandma Bloom was too tired to make another big dinner after all the Hanukkah food, and Mom's family was so mean to her that she doesn't like to be reminded of how they did Christmas, so I've never had mincemeat or anything like that in my life."

"Wow." Luna hops up into Abigail's lap, and she strokes her sleek little head, making her purr like a cat four times her size. "What about when you're here?"

"We go to Mrs. Katz's house, and she does roast a turkey, but all the side dishes are Korean."

"Ms. Katz and your dad are pretty much BFFs, huh?"

Morgan giggles. "I think so! Some of her cousins are hoping they'll get married, but I don't think so."

"Yeah, it's not like boys and girls can't be friends. You get anything really good? I did, but of course Luna's the best ever."

"Mom always goes overboard, we got tons of stuff. Dad probably likes his dumb old book about fishing best, he's kinda weird."

"Believe me, I know all about weird," Abigail says, through giggles of her own.

By the time Abigail gets off the phone, she has promised Morgan some leftovers, for food science, and a visit with Luna before she goes home. She makes her way into the kitchen, Luna trotting along behind her. Dad is putting something together from the leftovers, and is of course immediately on board with Abigail's mission. He helps her get a good sample of everything, and shows her how to arrange them in a pretty circle in a single-layer cake

transporter. He tucks it back into the fridge, unwilling to go anywhere until tomorrow, but that's about what Abigail was expecting.

Boxing Day is always a pleasant one, anyway. They just hang around and drink mulled wine (or apple juice,) and play games like Shut-The-Box and chess. Abigail isn't much good at chess, but teaching matches with the grownups are fun, and Dad and her aunts tell weird Japanese ghost stories that mostly don't make any sense, which keeps them from being the bad kind of scary, even when Abigail goes to bed and has time to think about them in the dark.

The next morning Dad takes Abigail and the leftovers to Mr. Graham's house. Abigail feels a little weird about being there, but mostly excited. Besides, a teacher who's your friend's dad is different from the regular kind, and all the class pets will be here, along with seven dogs. Everybody knows that Mr. Graham likes animals, but Abigail didn't think he had that many. The house is kinda small, too, all alone in the middle of some fields. When they pull into the driveway the door opens and all seven dogs and Morgan come running out, Morgan laughing and the dogs wagging their tails. They're very good dogs, and don't jump up or anything. They're probably getting hair all over Dad's pants, but that's a fact of life, and he doesn't seem to mind too much.

When they get inside, Abigail shows Morgan all the food and tells her about it, and then runs upstairs after her to see the room she uses when she's here. Abigail's room has all kinds of decorations because she's there all the time, so she's not surprised at how much plainer this place is than the pictures Morgan has shown her of her room at home. There are still some nice nature posters on the walls, of every type of place from vivid green jungles to white arctic plains, and the animals that live there. The sheets on the bed are flannel, something Abigail didn't even know existed, in a green-and-blue plaid.

"Dad has like, plaid flannel *everything*," Morgan says as they flop down onto the plain blue top blanket to look at the bat poster on the ceiling, and Abigail laughs.

"My dad is like that with check and paisley, I know how it is," she says, looking up at what must be thousands of bats, silhouetted against the setting sun. "Wow, that's cool."

"Yeah, I really like bats."

This of course takes them back to Halloween, and they're still chattering away when Dad comes up to collect Abigail. It has been longer than she realized, and they need to get home. Morgan walks to the door with them, and waves as they head out to the car, thanking them again for the food. Mr. Graham thanks them too, and he and Dad share one of those weird grownup looks that Abigail can't figure out.

Winter Morning

Hannibal could not have asked for a better excuse to get into Will's house, and is of course glad to take Abigail over to see her friend. After petting the dogs a bit, the two of them run upstairs, leaving their fathers in a silence that Hannibal wouldn't actually call awkward. It's a bit like being with an animal. A calm one, too, not the wary feral kind that Will so often resembles.

"Coffee?" Will asks, and it sounds like a very conscious effort to be human.

"Yes, please," Hannibal says, more to help him along than anything else. He drifts into the kitchen to watch Will work, surprised to see that it's not just drip coffee, but something actually made on the stove with loose grounds in a little percolater. It's not Hannibal's favorite method, but the cup Will pours for him is perfectly acceptable. They sit on the hair-covered couch to drink their coffee, because Sky enjoys the company.

"Cat settling in okay?" Will asks, not even looking at him, and Hannibal smiles.

"Yes. Morgan might have informed you that her name is Luna."

"She did," he says, smiling slightly and risking a glance at Hannibal. "Thanks for bringing Abigail over, I kind of worry about the kid being stuck with me."

Hannibal laughs. "In my professional opinion, Morgan is doing fine here."

"The hell am I thinking," Will says quietly, gazing into his cup, "getting involved with a pair of shrinks?"

"We will analyze you as little as we can, Will. After all, there are so many other things to do."

"You're terrible," Will grumbles, flushing bright pink. "The pair of you."

Hannibal chuckles, and leans over, stretching his neck to kiss Will's stubbly cheek. He stays right where he is and allows himself to be kissed, his flush deepening. "I consider myself on the clock when Morgan is around," he mutters, and Hannibal smiles.

"Of course you do. So do I."

He sits up straight again to finish his coffee. And to allow Will to regain his equilibrium, which he does, slowly. The terrier assists by jumping into his lap and demanding to be scratched behind the ears. His master obliges, and the little creature blissfully presses into his hand. Hannibal supposes that he can relate. He's a little startled when the big three-legged Boxer type starts nudging at his hand, but he strokes the animal's massive head, making him loll his tongue out in delight. When Hannibal glances up to Will, he meets with a beaming smile.

"I'm always so happy to see Kit approach guests," he says. "He's a rescue, and he was terrified when I found him. Took me hours to get him to come with me."

"Do you suppose he wouldn't fight?"

"Maybe," Will says. "That or some asshole just let him roam and didn't do anything about it when he got hit by a car. By the time I got him to the vet, they couldn't tell." He laughs at the way Kit wags and grins. "Telling me not to dwell on the past, huh? You're probably right."

By the time Hannibal needs to go collect Abigail, Will has introduced him to the entire pack, and shown him where the snake and the rat spend their time. He has also seen the tragically neglected piano, plinking a few pathetic, malformed notes on the poor thing. He wonders what it would take to persuade Will to allow him to get it tuned, but that's a problem for later.

For now Hannibal needs to work out the menu for New Year's Eve, and find something awfully compelling for Abigail to do. The latter is taken out of his hands completely when Cindy issues invitations to her New Year's sleepover. Her parents are aware that they owe him for Halloween, and admit that they can barely stay up until midnight anymore. Still, they feel that *someone* in the family ought to have a real party.

Hannibal does his best not to thank her too profusely, but he still has to duck into the bathroom to recover his composure before he tells Abigail that yes, of course she can go. She hugs him in her delight and runs off to tell Bedelia the good news. The even better news comes a few minutes later, that Morgan is also going. They'll all be unencumbered together, with Will off the clock. Sure enough, he calls Hannibal later to confirm, and to ask a few pertinent questions:

"This isn't black tie or anything, is it?"

Hannibal isn't sure just why Will's surly tones are so adorable, but he doesn't bother to question it. "No, Will. You would not be overdressed if you wore a tie, but you wouldn't be underdressed if you didn’t. Jeans might be a bit much, though."

He snorts lightly. "Of course." This comes out much more fond than surly, and Hannibal feels the kind of silly internal fluttering that he always thinks he's finally gotten too old for. "No being a dick if I get it wrong."

"At the very most, I might politely offer an article of my own clothing if any of yours were unsuitable," he says, and Will laughs.

"Hell, we've already done that part. I meant to give you your shirt when you were over here, but, y'know..."

"I do know. I'm in no hurry for it," he says, and takes his leave of Will. Bedelia decorates for New Year's Eve as well as for Christmas, and she needs his help to strip away most of the green and white to leave silver and gold. Hannibal is pleased to see how watchful Abigail is to be sure that Luna isn't eating any tinsel. The tree stays up, too complex to bother with beforehand, as well as being full of so many things made or chosen by Abigail.

New Year's Eve

Grateful as Bedelia is to get her daughter out of the house tonight, it's still a poignant experience. Not nearly as painful as sending her to camp had been and will be again, but with a small ache of its own. From a professional standpoint, it's nice to see Abigail securely attached and willing to go away from them, but she is the child's mother, and therefore checks over everything so much that Abigail starts sighing and rolling her eyes in what is surely a preview of adolescence.

"Mom," she says at last, "I have my toothbrush and clean clothes and my pajamas and your phone in case something happens, *and* Shut-The-Box, 'How To Train Your Dragon,' and Dad gave me a bag of trail mix even though Cindy's mom is going to feed us."

Bedelia chuckles, setting Abigail's overnight bag down and hugging her. "You're right, dearest, but parents always fuss."

"You need time to get ready anyway, Mom," Abigail says, and Bedelia smiles.

"You're more important, but thank you for the thought," she says, straightening up.

"What are you wearing tonight?" Abigail asks, and Bedelia smiles, taking her hand.

"Come and see," she says, leading Abigail to the bedroom, where tonight's dress is laid out on the duvet, possible accessories spread around it. Abigail always enjoys acting as her fashion consultant, and the child does have a good eye. Now she gazes awestruck at the silk, red as arterial blood.

"Oh wow, you never wear that one! I'm almost sorry I'm gonna miss it."

Bedelia laughs. "I'm sure I'll find another occasion. Valentine's Day, perhaps. What should I pair it with tonight?"

"Real diamonds," Abigail says, in a tone of great decision, and Bedelia hides her smile because she can tell that this is very serious.

A woman can't be married to Hannibal Lecter for almost thirty years without acquiring a few real jewels, and with what her mother left her, Bedelia has a little hoard of very nice pieces. With her usual good taste, Abigail insists on the big Marquise solitaire pendant and the little earrings that match it. It's a gorgeous set that will be her own when she's old enough, the chain of the pendant long enough to wear it with a scarf, in case Abigail is still wearing them when she's old enough for real jewels.

As soon as this crucial decision has been made and Abigail has put in a vote for the little black heels, Hannibal comes upstairs to inform them that Cindy's dad is en route. Since it's only five o'clock, Bedelia goes downstairs in her house dress to commend Abigail to her host's care and to wish the other guests a happy New Year as Abigail clambers into the

minivan with them. She takes the seat beside Morgan, and waves to Bedelia as Hannibal shuts the door and Rob pulls out of the driveway.

"How did we survive sending her to Greenwater?" Hannibal murmurs as the van pulls out of sight, and Bedelia chuckles.

"I have no idea," she says, and goes back into the house to begin the long process of putting herself together for a semi-formal evening with Will Graham on the guest list. Hannibal has some involved grooming of his own, and doesn't have the benefit of Abigail's fashion advice, so Bedelia answers his phone when it rings, sitting on the bed in diamonds and black lingerie, the dress still waiting for her.

"Bedelia?"

"Yes, Will?" she asks, trying not to laugh at his surprise.

"Will a plus-one be a problem? Beverly wants to drop in for a while."

"No problem at all, Will." Bedelia is sure that Beverly is coming as moral support in the face of her own and Hannibal's combined fearsomeness, and she's glad that Will has someone to bring. "Feel free to be unfashionably early," she adds.

"Okay," Will mutters. "Uh, until I see you, I guess. Bye." He hangs up and Bedelia laughs.

"Was that Will?" Hannibal asks, emerging from the bathroom with shirt tucked in and hair in place, buttoning his vest.

"It was," she says, "in full, awkward bloom. He's bringing Beverly with him. For courage."

Hannibal chuckles, selecting his tie for the evening, which of course has a lot of blood red in its pattern. They make a point of never clashing, and now is certainly no time to stop. "We shall have to try not to be alarming, beloved," he says, making the Windsor knot that this tie requires. It's perfectly straight, as always, but Bedelia stands up from the bed and prowls over in her stocking feet to pull it crooked for the pleasure of straightening it again, nestled in against Hannibal's chest. He chuckles and kisses the top of her head, wrapping his arms around her and murmuring at her in affectionate Italian until she pulls away to finish dressing. He shrugs into his jacket, watching her all the while, and she smiles at him. Whatever happens with Will, they'll get some fun out of this evening, one way or another.

As he does every year, Hannibal has chilled some very good champagne and made what seems like hundreds of beautiful little canapes, and spends the last half hour before the ostensible start of the party inspecting them. Frederick and Freddie won't turn up until at least eight-thirty, and Francis usually gets nervous and has to be coaxed along by Reba, the pair of them sometimes not here until nine. Bedelia isn't expecting her sisters-in-law or Eldon Stammets before ten, if at all. Chiyoh and Eldon both dislike New Year's as a holiday, and Mischa is still resting up after that grueling pre-Christmas surgery and might not feel like going into public if she doesn't have to. So when the doorbell rings at precisely five minutes after eight, Bedelia knows who it is.

New Year's Eve II

"What are you, twelve?" Beverly grumbles. "Don't mess up your hair," she adds, as they pull up to their destination and Will raises one hand to do just that. "I slaved over that hair and you are not fucking with it now." Will is tempted to say that he didn't ask her to, but can't deny that his reflection had looked a bit more attractive after Beverly had snipped off some of the back and run product through all the rest of it. Something about making it 'piecey' and 'touchable,' whatever that's supposed to mean.

Will sighs. "You're right."

"You look adorable, I look adorable, and we brought booze, it'll be fine," Beverly says, in a tone of such decision that Will laughs, feeling a little better.

"Thanks, Bev," he says, getting out of the car and rescuing the liquor from the back seat. "Hell, I think part of the nerves is just letting Morgan out of my sight."

"Aw, Will. She'll be fine." She gives him an encouraging pat on the shoulder and leads the way up to the door. The hedge is clipped into a heart now, and Will wonders how soon after Halloween they changed it, and if either of them clips the thing or if they hire someone for that. Hannibal seems like a man who could wield shears if he wanted to.

"Beverly," Bedelia says in that quiet voice of hers, "how good to see you."

Will feels like an idiot, shuffling his feet on the mat and cradling a bottle of brandy, but Bedelia gives him a smile that outshines her almost assuredly real diamonds. "We're so pleased you could make it," she says, and graciously accepts the bottle that Will mutely thrusts at her because yes, he is twelve on the inside. They follow her inside and Hannibal appears out of nowhere to take Beverly's coat, because he's that kind of guy. He moves on to Will as soon as he has the first coat hung up, and gets probably closer than he has to to do it. Will has the disquieting impression that Hannibal is *smelling* him, but he could be wrong.

Naturally, there are all kinds of tiny delicacies all ready, some of which involve goddamn quail eggs. Still, quail eggs turn out to be pretty good, and Beverly is of course fearless about strange and pungent foods, having been started on kimchi as a toddler. Will just hopes that he didn't miss any spots shaving and that he can keep quail egg off of his shirt while the others talk. He doesn't notice Hannibal watching him eat until he's done, which is a good thing, because the look he's giving Will probably would have made him drop the whole thing.

"What do you think?" he purrs, lounging against the back of the couch like a cat.

"Pretty good," Will says, delicately polishing his fingers on a paper napkin. Hannibal smiles and brushes some imaginary speck off of Will's shirt.

"I'm glad you didn't go with a tie," he murmurs, and then lets his fingers do the walking, right up Will's sternum to just rest on his pulse for a minute before he stands up to re-check the

number of champagne flutes. All real glass, of course. Will catches his breath, ignores Beverly's knowing look, and goes in search of the cat.

As the other guests start to trickle in, Will cradles Luna in his arms and hangs back while Beverly works the room, always returning to him to make sure that he's as comfortable as he can manage, sometimes with a friend or friend of a friend in tow, like the enormous man with the cleft palate scar who seems like he feels almost as out of place at a party as Will does. He relaxes a bit when his girlfriend comes in search of him, gently feeling her way with one hand and laughingly calling out, "Marco!"

"Polo!" Francis answers, going a few steps to meet her and taking her arm to introduce her to Will. She's very beautiful and has the open and unguarded expressions of someone who has been blind a long time.

Beverly abandons Will before midnight, but it's not hard to set down the cat and join in the group toast to good luck in the coming year at a quarter to midnight. He's slightly tipsy already, but another glass of champagne won't break him. After the toast it's a matter of milling around and waiting for midnight. Will lets himself out the glass door into the back yard to be alone for a moment, and just breathe and look up at the stars. The visibility is good, and he's picking out constellations when he hears the gentle swish of the door behind him. He looks around and Hannibal is there, smiling faintly in the mingled star-and streetlight as he closes it behind him, approaching Will on a rush of warm air.

"It's nearly midnight," he purrs, and Will looks up at him, heart pounding. He just stands there and waits for what feels like forever but must only be a minute, and then tips Will's chin up and kisses him. This one is slower, harder, and much dirtier than their first. Will can't help a quiet moan, sagging against Hannibal as he goes weak in the knees. He could stand on his own, but why would he do that when he could be pressed against Hannibal like this? He puts his arm around Hannibal's neck and groans as one of those big hands palms and squeezes his ass, hauling him even closer. Will is already hard and refuses to feel any shame for that while Hannibal is devouring his mouth like this. If the deep, rumbling noise he makes is any indication, he doesn't mind at all.

A Dark Night And A Bright Morning

A sleepover with Cindy and Morgan and everybody is about as much fun as Abigail would have guessed. They make bracelets and have breakfast for dinner, and even if Dr. Allen uses PAM, the eggs are good. She says Mrs. Allen or Sarah is fine, but Mom hates it when people act like she doesn't have a doctorate, so it's Dr. Allen as far as Abigail is concerned. Kara shows everyone how to French braid, and Abigail practices on Brooke's long hair while Cindy works on hers, and 'How To Train Your Dragon' is a hit with everyone, whether they've seen it before or not.

Still, everything has its drawbacks. Even though she's in third grade already, Abigail still gets worried when she sleeps away from home. It doesn't help that she left Bunbun behind in an effort not to appear babyish. They don't go to bed until after midnight, of course, but Dr. Allen wants them completely quiet by one in the morning, and they mostly are. Cindy stays up with Abigail for a bit, playing with one of the paper fortune-tellers they made earlier, but at last Abigail is alone with her thoughts and the dark, and they start to get scary and stupid.

Dad isn't going to go crazy and cut everyone up, and Abigail knows it perfectly well, but she starts thinking it again and gets all shaky. The rustling of her sleeping bag wakes Morgan up, but she's not mad. It would make everything worse if she was mad or scared, but she just keeps talking to Abigail like she's a scared animal, which is pretty much exactly right. Moving very slowly, she reaches out and starts rubbing circles on Abigail's upper back.

"It's okay," she says softly. "We're at the Allens's house, and everything is okay. It's..." she pulls out her phone and checks it, keeping the bright screen covered as much as she can.. "It's one forty-five in the morning."

Abigail nods, already feeling a lot better. "...How did you know how to do that?" she asks.

Morgan doesn't ask what she means. "My mom gets scared like that sometimes, and that's how we act with her. She opened Greenwater because she knows what it's like when something really bad happens, and how it doesn't always go away."

"Yeah," Abigail whispers, rolling closer to Morgan. "My brain is just being dumb, there's nothing to be scared of now."

"Yeah. You want to call them?"

"They're probably still up, but I don't want them to worry." It calms her down to think like this, because of course they're not doing anything bad-crazy. Mom is probably dancing with Dad to old music right now, or helping him clean up the kitchen. Either one is a soothing picture, and she lies down again, and listens to Morgan telling her all about her family's horses. She's not bragging, just talking about them like Abigail talks about Luna. She wishes Luna didn't get carsick and could have come along, but soon Morgan has talked them both to sleep.

They wake up to Cindy bounding around and yelling for everyone to come down to breakfast, and Abigail feels like it was some other kid freaking out in the night, because she's fine today, bouncing down the stairs with everyone else to have tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches, since who wants to eat breakfast twice in a row? Cindy's little brother Ben is there, babbling and making a mess. He has just turned two, which Abigail has heard is a very trying age, but he's in a good mood today, fat and happy and well-loved, Cindy encouraging his attempts to talk along with her mother. It's a very noisy breakfast table, but a very convivial one.

Mr. Allen is driving them back home, so when they leave at ten, it's more like boarding a school bus than leaving a party, all of them free to talk about every part of the party and compare bracelet designs all over again. Abigail's moment of panic last night stays a secret, just for her and Morgan. It doesn't feel like a bad secret, even though Uncle Rick might call it a counterproductive one. Abigail is getting ready to say goodbye to Morgan, who has so much further to go, all the way out to Mr. Graham's house, when she sees her dad's car still parked up by the steps, a gentle dusting of snow on the roof and windshield.

Because Mr. Allen is responsible, he parks the van and gets out, walking them up the steps and waiting for someone to answer the door. He seems pretty tense, but there's no reason for it. Dad is there in a minute, and greets them with a wide smile. He tells Mr. Allen that Mr. Graham drank a little too much.

"Not stupidly," he assures Morgan, "he wasn't sick, we just thought that he might as well sleep here and not have to wait to be fit to drive home."

"Okay," she says. "If it wasn't stupid I don't have to scold him for Mama." Dad laughs, all his sharp teeth gleaming the way they do when he's really pleased about something.

"I've got the rest of the girls in the van," Mr. Allen says, turning away. "Miles to go before I sleep."

"Thank you for taking good care of Abigail," Dad says, and then shuts the door as Mr. Allen goes back down the steps and Abigail and Morgan settle on the bench to take off their boots. Morgan leaves her stuff there, but follows Abigail when she runs upstairs to put her own away.

New Year's Eve III

Chapter Summary

> Will is alone with the Lecter-Du Mauriers, he is off the clock, and the children are gone: THIS IS NOT A DRILL

Finally having Will in his arms almost drives Hannibal to discourtesy. Somehow Will is smaller, lighter than Hannibal had realized, and the urge to simply carry him off and leave his guests to find their own way out is nearly overpowering. Even aware of his responsibilities, he takes his time about kissing Will. When he has to stop to breathe, he tugs Will's collar to the side and bites him, down near the clavicle where his work shirts will cover it.

"Fuck," Will mutters. His voice sounds strangled, and he clutches at Hannibal's hair with one hand and the back of his shirt with the other, pulling everything askew. Hannibal has seldom cared less. He growls and licks his way up from the hollow of Will's throat to the underside of his jaw, where he bites again, too gently to leave a mark.

"Any way you want it," Hannibal purrs into his ear, and Will lets out something that's almost a sob, hiding his face in the crook of Hannibal's neck for a long moment before he pulls away, shaking.

He curses quietly as he adjusts himself and smooths the tails of his shirt over the problem. An advantage to his habitual slovenly dress at last: the shirt has been untucked since eleven o'clock at the latest, and will raise no comment when they go back in. And they do have to go back in. Hannibal sighs, runs a hand through his hair, and straightens his shirt.

"Later, yes?" he asks Will, and Will just nods, flushed bright pink. Hannibal grins at him, and leads the way back inside to relieve Bedelia, who has been holding court in his absence, of course. She knows with a look what Hannibal has just been doing, and her smile widens a little. Will hides in the back of the room with the cat again while Francis and Reba take their leave, and then most of the opera contingent and Bedelia's favorite colleagues.

For a moment it looks like they'll have trouble getting rid of Frederick, who, to be fair, is usually quite welcome to stay as long as he likes and avail himself of a guest bed, but Freddie Lounds is as sharp as ever, and catches the significant glances and microscopic eyebrow movements that Hannibal directs at her over Frederick's head. She makes him take his last sip of the surprisingly good brandy that Will and Beverly brought, and herds him right out the door, to Hannibal's eternal gratitude.

Will is curled up on one end of the couch, looking more closed off and wary than Hannibal would like to see him, but it's probably just nerves, because he gives Hannibal a real smile

when he sits down beside him, and lets him take his hand. "Are you nervous, Will?" he asks, kissing it.

"Yeah," Will says, with that wry, self-deprecating smile that Hannibal always wants to kiss off his face.

"We will not laugh at you, and we'll stop anything you tell us to. Really, anything that you don't seem to enjoy."

"Okay," he says softly, and laces his fingers with Hannibal's. Bedelia comes sweeping up to them, and smiles, a half-empty glass in her languid fingers. Somehow she never drops them, however precarious her hold may look.

"Whatever happens, am I joining in, watching, or reading a good book in another room?" she asks, and Will laughs, running a nervous hand through his curls.

"Uh, well... I've never been with more than one person before, so maybe start off watching?"

"Fine," she says, "I like to watch. Join me upstairs when you're ready." She swishes away in her blood-red silk and Hannibal loves her so much that it's an actual pain in his chest.

He looks back to Will and smiles. "We can start slowly."

"Can we?" Will asks, raising an eyebrow and rubbing at the mark Hannibal left earlier. It's delightful to see him confident enough to be arch, and Hannibal undoes the third button of Will's shirt.

"I think we can manage," he says softly.

Will shudders and presses into the touch, eyes very wide and very blue without those ridiculous glasses. Hannibal kisses him again, easing his shirt open as he does so. Will has a soft, responsive mouth, but his teeth are sharp and he kisses like he's hungry for it, clutching at Hannibal the way he had outside. He wraps one leg over Hannibal's hip, rock hard again already. Hannibal chuckles and kisses his way down Will's chest, shockingly smooth for a man with constant facial stubble. He nibbles at the naked skin of his solar plexus for a moment, and then drifts to one hard nipple, pleased when Will squirms and presses into his mouth.

It's a wrench, but Hannibal pulls away after a long moment, not wanting Will to rub off against his leg. He probably has at least one more in him, with his relative youth and nervous energy, but it would still be a bit of a waste. And Bedelia wouldn't even get to watch Will come. No, they have to go upstairs, and after a little grumbling, Will is docile enough. Hannibal drapes Will's shirt neatly over his forearm and leads him upstairs by the hand. Will is silent and tense again, but most of is probably arousal. Hannibal smiles when he opens the bedroom door to find Bedelia wrapped in a dressing gown and settled into the armchair, moved from its innocent position by the desk to give her the best possible view of the bed. Their toybox is sitting beside her, along with champagne on ice and a carafe of water. There are also three champagne flutes, including the full one in her hand.

"Make yourselves comfortable," she says, with a grand gesture to the bed, covers pulled back and a folded towel near the head of the bed, so no one will have to sleep in the wet spot.

Will comes over all shy again, but lets Hannibal start unbuttoning his pants before pulling away and demanding that Hannibal be more naked. Mindful of his promise, Hannibal does not laugh at this. He just smiles and pulls off his tie, draping it over the foot of the bed along with Will's shirt, and a few seconds after, his own shirt and waistcoat. Will stares at him for a moment, and then lets Hannibal pull him close, shuddering and biting at his jaw..

"You said any way I wanted it," he breathes. "Did you mean that?"

"Within reason, yes. No infectious bodily fluids and nothing that takes too much equipment. Urine is generally not infectious."

Will laughs, and bites him in a burst of puppyish enthusiasm. "I'm not quite that fancy, I just really want to get inside you."

Hannibal does his best not to whimper audibly. "I can live with that," he says, and Bedelia tosses lube and condoms onto the bed before taking another long sip of champagne, her eyes locked on them as she swallows.

New Year's Eve IV

For Bedelia, this really is the best of both worlds. She gets to see Hannibal getting fucked, and she doesn't have to do the work herself. It's very tiring, even with such an appreciative partner. This way she can lounge and drink while Will and Hannibal do their level best to eat each other alive.

She's pleased to note that Will enjoys being bitten, and just groans when Hannibal lovingly fondles his throat. That's one of his own ways of being alarming, and Bedelia is glad to see Will unfazed by it. He just grinds against Hannibal and then moans, the sound only getting louder when Hannibal pushes his fingers into Will's open mouth. He pushes forward to take them deeper before pulling off to attack Hannibal's throat and his chest, sucking and biting in a way that will leave Hannibal borrowing her makeup for days to come. She has a feeling that he won't mind at all.

Will grimaces a little when his investigating hand discovers Hannibal only about half-hard. Hannibal just chuckles, gently tugging at Will's hair. "You'll have to forgive my decrepitude, Will. And my impatience. Fuck me and don't wait around for that."

He slithers out of his pants and Will assists him with the process, sliding his hands up through the leg holes of Hannibal's boxer-briefs to grope his ass before pulling them down and off, carelessly flinging both garments to hang over the footboard before he starts struggling with his own grey slacks. Hannibal props himself up a little to help, unveiling white boxer-briefs that are already partially transparent with pre-ejaculate. The fabric stains as best it can to fully cover Will, but it's a futile effort, the tip of his erection poking over the waistband, much thicker than Bedelia would have thought. In fact, Will is actually quite impressive, once Hannibal has helped him to scramble out of his last scrap of clothing. He blushes yet again as Hannibal's eager examination of it.

"I, uh... if you think I won't fit, we can trade," he mutters.

"Ah, but I know what you would prefer, Will, and right now we want exactly the same thing." He gives Will as squeeze that makes him whimper, pulling him close to kiss him again. "Would you enjoy it later?" he murmurs, and Will shivers and moans a little, starting to slowly rut along Hannibal's thigh.

"Yeah, probably," he gasps.

"For now, how do you want me?" Hannibal purrs, and Will groans, clinging to Hannibal and hiding his face in his chest for a moment to collect himself before sitting back and pushing him to roll onto his belly, which he does with happy alacrity.

Will finds the lube and kneels between Hannibal's thighs, getting his first two fingers extremely slick. He's shaking a little, but his hand is steady as he just strokes over Hannibal's hole for a moment. There's a tentative delicacy to the way he moves, but Bedelia can tell that his touch is firm, because Hannibal is melting under it, flat and lazy on the mattress,

spreading his legs wider and just barely arching his back, letting Will do every bit of the work.

Will doesn't seem to mind, staring down at the sleek, powerful curve of Hannibal's back, enraptured. He's shaking a little, but his hand is steady and careful as he works the tip of one finger into Hannibal. "Mmmorrre," Hannibal mumbles, and Will chuckles breathlessly, pulling back and then pushing both fingers in to the knuckle as as Hannibal growls long and low, rising just a little on his knees.

"Better?" Will asks with sugary sweetness, and Hannibal laughs.

"Yes, thank you," he replies in the same tone, and then groans deep in his chest as the muscles in Will's forearm shift with the movements of his fingers.

Will adds a third finger, really fucking Hannibal with them now, and he moans, getting the rest of the way onto his knees and starting to push back in earnest. Bedelia smiles, and drains her glass, refilling it and standing to walk her slow way around the bed. She can see Will's back tense a little as he tries to keep track of her movements, but he's three fingers deep into Hannibal, who has started making harsh, breathy sounds, planting his hands on the headboard to grind back.

Bedelia kneels by Hannibal's head and offers him a sip of wine. It takes him a moment to notice it, but he accepts a taste, almost losing it as Will adds a little more lube and stretches him open. He mumbles in Lithuanian, which means that Will must have a very deft touch, but finds his English again in a moment.

"It's enough," he pants, looking over his shoulder at Will. "Fuck me!" Bedelia follows his gaze, and finds that Will is well worth seeing. Hannibal thinks more of Will’s beauty than she does. He's such a tense, twitchy little man, but now he looks at once wild and very controlled. He grins, eyes fiery and hair beyond disheveled, and he looks like nothing so much as a werewolf in his human skin. She smiles back at him, and points to where the nearest condom has slid almost under his knee.

"Thanks," Will growls, and tears it open with a delightful lack of fumbling. He remembers to add lube to the inner surface and to the pinch the reservoir tip before rolling it on as well, something Bedelia is always glad to see in younger men. He's very careful about just rutting along Hannibal's hole for a moment to spread the lube, and it's touching to see how very, very gently he works his broad tip into Hannibal, like he's fragile instead of a hardened sybarite who is just barely too polite to scream for more cock and right now.

She rubs a soothing circle on his back to let him know that she understands, and says to Will, "You've been careful enough. You can have him now."

Will stares at her for a moment that feels endless, and then he's sinking into Hannibal like he can't help it, letting out a low, shaky, guttural moan, the raw, completely uninhibited sound of a desperate need just beginning to be sated. He grinds at deeply into Hannibal as he can possibly get and then just stays there, whimpering softly. Hannibal makes no sound but harsh breathing, and right when Bedelia is about to interject again, Will finally starts to move.

He may be on the scrawny side, but there's a lot of power in that small body. His thrusts rock the entire bed and force low grunts and long moans out of Hannibal, along with utter filth in his native tongue. Sex has to be pretty good to make that happen, and Bedelia purrs, biting his neck as she digs her nails into his back, clawing red stripes into his pale skin as he groans and turns his head, making a sweet little mewling noise as she kisses him.

New Year's Eve V

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will isn't rude enough not to give Hannibal a reach-around, but by the time he remembers to do it, there's almost no holding back. He grips that smooth, uncut cock, and enjoys the contact the way he always does, this feeling of knowing how to operate equipment just like his own. Just concentrating on his hand helps for a few seconds, but Hannibal is so tight and so hot, taking everything Will gives him, that he can't last.

He actually does start trying to remember baseball stats, but that's no use and in the end he just howls and comes harder than he has in years, bucking and shaking and letting go of Hannibal's cock to cling to his bony hips tight enough to bruise. He presses his face to Hannibal's chest and sobs his way to a stop, hoping that the others don't think he's actually crying in panic or guilt, but he can't stop the cracked, hiccupy sounds he's making.

"Will?" Hannibal murmurs, and Will hugs him tightly.

"S-sorry," he says softly, and Hannibal chuckles.

"Much as I was enjoying that, there are plenty of other things to do. Are you all right?" His accent is the thickest Will has ever heard it, and he's a little slurred with arousal, which makes Will feel a bit better about going off like a firecracker on the third of July.

"Yeah, just a little embarrassed," Will admits, only raising his head enough to be audible and then going back to his best limpet impression. He jumps slightly at a gentle touch on his head, but then realizes that it's just Bedelia petting him, and actually feels pretty nice. Letting her pet him to sleep sounds really good, but Hannibal is still hard and Will's dry spell is ending with a monsoon and he can sleep when he is fucking dead.

"Beloved," Hannibal mumbles, "you really must ask before you touch." Bedelia's gentle hand stops, and Will presses into it like a dog, making her laugh softly and continue.

"Mm cool with hair-petting," Will adds, muffled by Hannibal's back. He turns his head a little so he can actually see Bedelia, a little flushed but otherwise the least disheveled person in the room. "Didn't like not knowing where you were, but that was what, three seconds?"

"For me part of watching is being Hannibal's support staff," she says, still gently stroking his hair. "I suppose I should have mentioned that."

"'Sokay," Will mumbles, and then props himself up with a valiant effort and slowly pulls out of Hannibal. He's always careful not to make a mess with used condoms, and he can see his hosts appreciating the effort. Bedelia picks up the wastebasket and holds it for Will, so he doesn't have to get off the bed. "Thanks," he says, dumping the knotted condom.

"Earlier you said that I should 'maybe start off' watching," Bedelia says, putting the wastebasket back and looking at Will with a solicitous tenderness that makes him feel embarrassed and also cared for. He squirms a bit, and glances down at Hannibal, lying there with a hardon he could probably use as a hatstand, perfectly lazy and apparently content to remain where he is.

"I feel pretty responsible for Hannibal right now..." he says, and Hannibal laughs, eyes still closed.

"I can take care of him," Bedelia says, and at this Hannibal does open his eyes.

"But who, mio caro, will take care of you?" Hannibal asks, gazing up at her and then glancing over to Will. "Will, darling, would you mind if Bedelia made use of my mouth while you discharge your responsibility?"

"I would not mind that at all," Will says, much more seriously than he means to, but this plan involves *naked Bedelia*.

He kneels on the mattress and watches as she slides out of her nearly-sheer robe. Her skin glows like a pearl, and Will is filled with a desire to touch that almost outweighs the nervousness that comes with how fragile and complex women are. He wants to say something, let her know how fucking gorgeous she is, but nothing comes out. He swallows hard, gives up, and curls up at the foot of the bed with the remaining condom and the lube, just watching as Bedelia kisses Hannibal, long and slow and probably the closest they ever get to sloppy.

He likes the way they look together. It's kind of a Beauty and the Beast thing, Bedelia looking so tiny, so fucking *dainty* in Hannibal's arms, but there's a bestial power to her as she bites Hannibal's neck, and he is more than beautiful as he sighs and shakes under it. His cock twitches and beads up with precome as Bedelia climbs up to straddle his face, her back to Will. It gives him courage that she can't see him, and he uncurls enough to settle between Hannibal's thighs, just nuzzling the skin for a minute, kissing an old scar and mouthing along it to another. There are several scattered over Hannibal's skin, but nothing that screams horror, no cigarette burns, no long slashes stretched by growth.

Will sighs and nuzzles in by Hannibal's balls, shivering as one long, muscular leg wraps around him. Hannibal's heel digs gently into the small of Will's back, trying to pull him even closer. Will obeys, opening the condom and preparing it and rolling it onto Hannibal as Bedelia groans and starts to ride Hannibal's face, as slowly and gracefully as she does everything else. For a moment Will is hypnotized by his perfect view of one of the best asses he has ever seen, but then the tip of Hannibal's cock pokes him in the chin, a gentle reminder of his agenda. He licks his lips and opens for it, moaning softly as he slides down.

Will always forgets how much he likes this, and now is no exception. He can't take the whole thing, but trying feels incredible, stretching his lips and teasing the edges of his gag reflex until he pulls back to let the tip rub along the roof of his mouth before trying to take it all again. Already close to the edge and with a faceful of Bedelia, it doesn't take long for Hannibal to let out a wild, muffled cry, hips bucking up into Will's mouth as he groans and Bedelia makes a soft, high, preyish sound that Will wants to hear at least fifty more times. He

stays on Hannibal until he's soft again and then lets him go with a sigh. He's mostly hard again, but figures it would be bad manners to mention it. Glancing up, he sees that Hannibal has clawed eight red lines into Bedelia's hips, and isn't quite sure how his erection should feel about that.

Chapter End Notes

This will go on as long as it has to. Just like my back pain only sexy and not horrible. *eats more pills*

Second Breakfast (Adults Are Silly)

As Abigail runs upstairs with Morgan right behind her, she can hear the shower running, which probably accounts for Mom. Abigail is of course delighted to show Morgan her room, full of various keepsakes, posters, books, and her best toys, precious things like Bunbun. Morgan doesn't say a thing about Bunbun being babyish, and pets his soft, soft ears, still so plush after many washings.

"That's Bunbun," Abigail says. "I named him when I was four, that's my excuse."

Morgan laughs. "He looks like a Bunbun. Besides, my favorite doll is stuck with Lala, he's not alone."

That makes both of them giggle again, looking up as the cracked door creaks open a little wider as Luna pushes her way in.

"Mmmyyyyoooww?" Luna enquires, and Abigail coaxes her inside and then holds her hand flat above the cat's head. Luna rises up on her hind feet to be petted, and, and purrs when she drops down again and Morgan offers her hand to sniff. It takes Luna about half a second to decide that Morgan is all right. They sit on Abigail's floor and play with Luna until Morgan asks Abigail where Mr. Graham is.

"I don't want to bother him," she adds as they get up and go into the hallway, Luna padding along behind them, "but I do want to check on him.

"You know they never want us to worry *too* much about them," Abigail says, and Morgan nods.

"I know, but Dad's kinda fragile. I don't understand the whole thing, but if he gets too sick or too tired, he goes kinda crazy and needs special help, so I like to watch out for him when I'm here."

"Can I tell my Mom and Dad about that? 'Cause they know crazy, and would probably know what to look for. I mean, they're *so* friends already, they hardly let anybody stay overnight."

Morgan thinks about it, the two of them just outside the guestroom, talking more quietly now. "I guess you can. They found out about it before I was born, but I hear it was scary."

Abigail nods, patting Morgan's shoulder and then carefully opening the door, lifting it by the knob because it creaks if she doesn't. This time it opens silently, and sure enough, there's Mr. Graham in the guest bed. He's still asleep, curled up into a ball. The curtains are drawn, of course, but they're the kinda sheer ones Mom got so that they could have privacy and natural light at the same time. The whole room is just a little bit pink from the curtains, and Abigail smiles to see that Mr. Graham is wearing Dad's grey silk pajamas, with the cuffs of the sleeves carefully safety pinned up because Dad is bigger than Mr. Graham.

Morgan pads over to him and gazes down at his sleeping face like she'll need to make a report about it later, and then goes over to the little desk in the corner. What must be Mr. Graham's clothes from the night before are neatly stacked on the desk, folded the way Mom does. Dad has his own way, and Abigail never perfectly duplicate either one, though they do say she's neat for her age. She's pleased to see that Mr. Graham bothered to wear slacks, a button-up shirt, and a jacket. Her parents like it when people make a real effort, even if they don't go as far as a tie, something Abigail sees no sign of.

After Morgan checks the stack over, probably just making sure her dad has all his stuff, they tiptoe out again. There's opera floating up the stairs, and the smell of warming butter. Upon investigation, Dad is making a frittata and singing along to what sounds like one of Mimi's parts from La Boheme. He grins when Abigail laughs at him, and assures Morgan that Mom will wake Mr. Graham up to keep him from missing breakfast.

"After all," he says, whipping the eggs and milk into golden fluff, "we all stayed up too late, and he needs the nutrients as much as any of us.

"We had sandwiches at Cindy's," Abigail says, going to look at the chopped up ham and vegetables Dad is going to add, "but we'll have a little bit. You like eggs, right, Morgan?"

Morgan does like eggs, and refreshingly, has some idea what a frittata even is. She doesn't like mushrooms in eggs, though, but that's okay. There's still plenty of leek and spinach and cheese, so it's not a huge loss. And Abigail supposes that fresh ones do make the finished product just a little watery. At the tail end of this discussion, with Dad telling Morgan that he'll make her something with dried chanterelles sometime, Mom comes out in a bathrobe to hug Abigail hello and to greet Morgan. She may still be in her fluffy pink bathrobe, but her hair is already blown dry and twisted up, like usual. She kisses Dad on the cheek, and then drifts back upstairs to get dressed and wake Mr. Graham.

People always make jokes about women taking so much longer than men to get ready, but Mom is back at the table in in a wine-red house dress, eyeliner, lip stain, and a pair of earrings way before Mr. Graham comes shuffling down. He's carrying what must be his good clothes in one of the shopping bags Mom sometimes saves, and wearing one of Dad's weird long-sleeved t-shirts with the buttons, like when Luna puked on him. This one is black and only a little too big instead of a lot, though, and Abigail is pretty sure he's wearing his own pants and socks. He looks kind of embarrassed, but grins when Morgan bounces up to hug him.

"Hey, kiddo," he says, hugging back. "You have fun?"

"Yep!" She grins up at him. "You?"

He actually blushes for real, but laughs and says, "Yes." He must feel pretty silly about getting drunk. Uncle Rick sure does, but he's only allowed to about three times a year, anyway, since most people have two kidneys and he's only got one now. Morgan giggles at Mr. Graham and he just shrugs, letting her lead him to the empty place between herself and Mom, which has a plate of pretty cut-up fruit on it, just waiting for the main dish. Dad brings the pan out of the oven and takes the last chair, serving Morgan first because she's a guest, then Abigail because she's a growing child, Mom because she's a lady, and then Mr. Graham

and himself. They share a look as he dishes up Mr. Graham's share that makes them both laugh at something that they refuse to explain.

New Year's Eve VI

Hannibal always loves the way Bedelia tastes, and he sighs and wraps his arms around her waist, letting her surround him with her scent for a while longer before he has to push her back to breathe. She shuffles down from his neck to his waist and then tips herself to one side, her leg and arm looped affectionately over him. Will is kneeling at the foot of the bed, fully erect again and looking adorably bashful about it. Hannibal chuckles and lets his head fall back onto the pillow, beckoning him close with the arm that isn't wrapped around Bedelia.

Will crawls to him, and is so graceful about it that Hannibal knows he'll be trying to draw this view of him later. For now he mops his face off with a disinfectant wipe and then a milder one to get rid of the chemical smell, because while he trusts his wife's infectious fluids with his life, the same can't be expected of Will just yet. Once he's clean enough he kisses him hungrily, because he can already tell that he'll never be able to get enough of the contrast between Will's soft lips and his rough stubble, or the little noises he makes as he snuggles into Hannibal's side, almost mirroring Bedelia. He shudders as he makes contact with Hannibal's thigh.

Bedelia opens one eye and smiles, watching them until Hannibal pulls back to admire his work. Will is still flushed, but that feral look is back, and Hannibal can tell that he has vaulted over his shyness again. The contrast only makes him more delicious, and Hannibal purrs as Will bites his neck. Hannibal can feel Bedelia watching them, and when he looks at her, Will follows his gaze.

Bedelia smiles languorously at him, and walks one mischievous little hand up Will's arm even as she murmurs, "is this okay?"

"So okay," Will says softly, looking nervous and hungry at the same time.

"May I assist you with your current predicament, or should I leave the serious stuff to Hannibal?"

"I, uh... I get too hung up on how complicated women are sometimes. But then I remember that I really am bi. Like right now."

Bedelia laughs, leaning across him to kiss Will. Hannibal doesn't have the best angle on it, but it makes a lovely picture just the same. He twines his fingers into their hair, fair and dark, and gently tugs, following their movements as Bedelia reduces Will to a mewling mess.

"How do you want to do this?" Bedelia whispers against Will's lips, less than a breath away from kissing him. Will whimpers, and then shyly asks if Bedelia would mind fucking him. Hannibal is almost surprised that he doesn't add an actual 'if it's not too much trouble,' but mercifully, he does not.

"Mind?" Bedelia coos, "Don't be ridiculous. Hannibal?"

"Indeed," he says, sitting up and helping her to make her way over his legs to Will. He hops up and rounds the bed to get two more condoms in case one of fumbling, and sets them by Bedelia's hand. He thinks of settling into the armchair to watch, but Will reaches for him, so of course he goes back. He stretches out beside Will and kisses and bites him while Bedelia rolls the condom onto him. She's still wet and open, and slides onto Will with no difficulty, something he might cause if she didn't already have an orgasm under her belt. As it is, Bedelia sighs and sinks down, panting as she delights in the stretch. Will rests gentle hands on her hips and gazes up at her. Even after all these years, Hannibal can relate to the rapt and awed look on his face.

Bedelia rocks her hips, keeping Will deep inside and the pace slow. He lets out a short, rough noise each time Bedelia grinds down onto him, and soon he's clutching at her back hard enough to leave red marks of his own. As he claws at her, Bedelia's eyes go wide, and she cries out as Hannibal reaches between them to rub a fast, light circle on her clit. Will whimpers and writhes a little under her, nails still digging into her skin as she gasps and then comes in a beautiful, breathless silence that Will breaks by following her with a long, helpless groan. She sighs and tips forward to rest on Will for a moment as Hannibal kisses them both and tells them how beautiful they are until he has to tear himself away to grab cleanup supplies.

Will is about three-quarters asleep at this point, and Bedelia chuckles, snuggling up to him as Hannibal throws away the condom and starts to wipe all the stickiness off of both of them and himself. It takes a while, but at last he can rough Will's sweat-damp skin with the towel before laying it neatly on the few small wet spots on the sheet. Usually they would have had the foresight to put it down in the beginning, but Will really is distracting. Hannibal presses against one side and Bedelia takes the other as Will does his best to snuggle up to both of them at once, mumbling softly and incomprehensibly to himself. It's adorable, but after a while they need to shake him awake to give him two glasses of water for each one of champagne, along with a few kisses that are more soothing than erotic.

Once Hannibal is sure that Will is comfortably settled into Bedelia's arms, he gets up and throws on his robe, padding downstairs to make a plate of sandwiches out of the odds and ends of the night's canapes. By the time he gets back, Will is a bit more awake, and both of them are glad to see food. Hannibal feels his usual warm glow at feeding those he cares about, and lounges with them, helping them denude the plate completely.

Will lets out a nervous little laugh when Hannibal sets the plate aside, and he does his best not to sigh. "Are you all right, Will?"

"Just sort of, y'know, realizing what just happened here," he says, a little sarcastic and just a touch wild-eyed, in a much less feverish way than before.

"It was rather a lot, wasn't it?" Hannibal asks gently, putting an arm around him. Will nods. "You don't need to worry about us acting inappropriately when you're on the clock, Will."

He nods, and then looks suddenly horrified. "Morgan! Fuck, what time is it? I need to be home before she gets back!"

"It's half-past four in the morning," Bedelia says in that calm, steady voice that has eased so many panic attacks, "and you don't need to be home. Our house is on the way to yours, and your car is parked out front."

"Christ, it is," Will mutters, not sounding much more at ease.

"Will, darling," Hannibal says, kissing his cheek. "It's New Year's Eve. We'll simply say that you got drunk and spent the night in the guest room."

"...I can't say that's not plausible," Will says, sounding a little better.

"Exactly," Hannibal says, and brackets Will with Bedelia, both of them just leaning on him, offering warmth and silent presence.

"Okay," Will says at last. "you guys are right."

"The bed is all made up," Bedelia says, "and you can borrow some plausible deniability pajamas from Hannibal."

New Year's Eve VII

Bedelia can't help but be a little impatient with Will's reactive fit of nerves, but she conceals it and does her best to be patient. Cuddling seems to relax him a great deal, and they press his wispy little frame between them, stroking his hair and covering him in soft kisses until he's calm enough to shower. He's stumbling when he comes out, completely exhausted, and Hannibal gets up to support him and help him dry off.

The two of them are very sweet together, and after Bedelia finishes folding Will's discarded clothes, she lounges in filthy splendor in the middle of the bed, determined not to get up until tomorrow. Or much later today, technically. Hannibal tenderly helps Will into the pajamas, and then turns the cuffs up, pinning them in place. Will yawns, watching him with a faint smile.

"Thanks for taking care of me," he says softly, and Hannibal looks up from where he's kneeling at Will's feet, putting in the last pin.

"You're more than welcome, darling," he says, and stands up again, kissing Will's cheek before looking to the bed. "Bedelia?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you mind if I go rest with Will for a bit to get him settled?"

"Not a bit," she coos, and cuddles down into their combined scent in the middle of the bed, blowing each of them a kiss.

She leaves the lamp on so that Hannibal can find his way back. His night vision is excellent, but there's no moon tonight to help him along. She drifts for a while, into strange dream-fragments about the absent moon, and then comes fully awake again to find herself still alone. Lazy as she was feeling earlier, she gets up now, putting on her robe and padding over to the guestroom. There still light coming from under the door, but she opens is cautiously, smiling to see Hannibal curled around Will from behind, his face nuzzled into Will's hair.

Will opens one eye as she approaches, and Hannibal just chuckles. "I was hoping you would join us, beloved," he mumbles. She crawls into bed behind Hannibal, tucking herself in against his back and stretching her arm across him to just rest one hand on Will's belly. His skin is softer and smoother than she would have expected before tonight, and she rubs it a little, just enjoying the texture, keeping her touch too firm to tickle. Will makes a contented humming noise and snuggles back against Hannibal.

All three of them spend at least half an hour just breathing together in the low light, but at last Will twitches in the grip of the kind of myoclonic jerk that happens at the lip of sleep. They stay with him for a little longer, making sure that he's well and truly under before sliding out of the bed. Hannibal tucks the covers up around Will to keep the warmth in, and Bedelia switches off the lamp, their path to the door unobstructed. They tiptoe through pitch blackness and then step into the hallway, lit by their own lamp.

Hannibal carefully shuts the guestroom door and then turns to her, grinning. He looks like the proverbial kid on Christmas morning, and she leads the way back into their room so she can laugh without disturbing Will. Hannibal hugs her around the waist and lifts her off her feet, his laughter mingling with hers as he puts her back on the bed and then wraps around her like an extremely fond octopus. It takes Bedelia a while to stop laughing, and she has to catch her breath afterward, her head tucked up under Hannibal's chin. He tangles his fingers in her hair and sighs, sounding perfectly happy.

"Nothing like completing a long-term goal, is there?" Bedelia asks, and he chuckles.

"Indeed. I was glad to see you enjoy him so much, my beautiful."

"He really is very sweet, even if he must be silly."

"Even so," Hannibal says, and kisses her forehead. "I really might love him. Is that still all right?"

"That's still all right," Bedelia says, kissing him lightly on the mouth. It is all right, and she's able to quickly drift into a deep and easy sleep in Hannibal's arms.

Bedelia comes half-awake when Hannibal gets out of bed, but doesn't actually open her eyes until she hears a knock on the front door. She gets up as Hannibal and Rob talk, and is in the shower by the time she hears Abigail and what must be Morgan thundering up the stairs. Bedelia takes a long, hot shower, and blows her hair mostly dry before going downstairs to welcome the girls and wish Hannibal a good morning. He's glowing, of course, and Bedelia is glad that Abigail isn't any older, because Hannibal is remarkably obvious. She supposes she's obvious, as well, and tries not to laugh as she goes upstairs to fetch Will. It only takes a little shake to wake him up, and he's adorably grateful for the fresh shirt Bedelia has brought. She can't help sitting on the edge of the bed to kiss him softly, but keeps it chaste because the girls are back.

"Come down for breakfast when you're ready," she says, and goes to put herself together. It takes Will a long time to feel ready, but she's glad to see him more happy than embarrassed when he joins them at last.

Going Home

Will does his best to eat like a man rather than a malfunctioning vacuum cleaner, but he's not sure of his success. He's starved after his exertions, and everything is delicious. He can't help but feel like a beacon of sin, but Morgan and Abigail don't seem to notice anything, and by the time breakfast is over Will is actually pretty calm, and not just faking.

Still, he needs to flee into the clear winter morning, and does as soon as he can without being a jerk to Morgan, who is making the most of her one real chance to play with Luna. They'll be leaving for the Bloom homestead late tomorrow night, and will probably be too busy packing to visit. At last she manages to tear herself away from Abigail and Luna, and Will skitters out the door with a promise to return the shirt as soon as he can.

Morgan has already reported on the slumber party, but she does so in greater depth on the drive home. It's a relief, because all Will has to do is listen and agree. It sounds like a good time really was had by all, and that makes Will feel a bit better about his own debauchery. At least he's only the tiniest bit hungover. Champagne always gives him a headache, but of course he has to reassure Morgan when he takes aspirin as soon as they get home.

"It's just a little one, Morgan. This is probably all I need."

"Mama does say that champagne gives people worse headaches."

"It does," Will said. "I probably should've had juice instead of coffee, but it's too late to do the right thing now."

"Lucky for you," Morgan says, "Mom got me two good books, so I can be quiet."

"Try and find all your socks, okay?" Will calls as she trots upstairs. She yells an affirmative and Will lets the dogs out, feeds them, and then drapes himself over the couch with a cold towel on his forehead and Winston on his legs. By the time he's feeling a bit more rested and the pills have kicked in, Morgan has found almost all of her socks and Beverly has called Will to demand a complete report. Once Will has got Morgan settled with a snack because he doesn't feel up to making lunch yet, he steps into the other room and mutters a few of the salient details to Beverly, who has the decency to hold her phone away from her mouth when she shrieks in delight.

"I knew it would work! Are you freaking out? I bet you're freaking out."

"Maybe a little," Will admits.

"To be fair, you're gonna get a lot of space to think about it," Beverly says, and he laughs.

"True." Alana and Margot are a two and a half hour flight away, so there's no risk of running into either Lecter-Du Maurier for the next week.

There's a slight risk of going insane as he helps Morgan pack up what feels like everything in the universe, but Will is used to that. At least the trip home is a lot easier for Morgan than the trip out, because now she can just sleep with her head in Will's lap and let him worry about everything. When they stagger down to the baggage claim at two in the morning, Alana is waiting for them. Will smiles at the way Morgan runs to her, and he shuffles after to get a hug of his own.

The nice thing about a red eye flight is that Will is too tired to give anything away upon arrival. He just hugs Margot, shakes hands with Alana's younger brother who's also a belated holiday visitor, and staggers upstairs. The house isn't nearly as ostentatious as the horrible old Verger manse, but it's still pretty big. Will doesn't *have* to sleep in the tiny little room up under the eaves, but he likes it there.

Over the next week of Morgan being at school and leaving Will and Margot in perfect freedom to talk over old times and ride horses all day, and Alana being around in the evening for drinks by the fireside, the whole situation comes out within two days. Will had known that it would, but he had forgotten that Hannibal is one of the people who taught Alana her trade, and she has to muffle her laughter to keep from waking her brother or Morgan.

"I never would have thought of it in a million years," she says, "but it actually makes a strange kind of sense. Almost like dream logic."

Will rolls his eyes and Margot gives him a sympathetic look over the rim of her glass. "At least we're getting into the second semester now," she says, and Will chuckles.

"God knows what I'll do over spring break."

"I'm sure you'll think of something," Margot says, and that sets Alana off again. She's a little drunk, and very prone to giggling at this stage. "You're cut off," Margot tells her, and she nods even as she keeps laughing. "Silly thing," Margot says, and moves to sit on the arm of Alana's chair, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek and then the mouth when she stops laughing.

Will drains his drink and quietly takes his leave, stopping on his way up to the attic to check on Morgan. Her door is open just a crack, and peeking in he can see her curled up under the blankets, breathing slowly. He tiptoes away, and soon is asleep and dreaming of an ossuary that feels like home.

It's always a bit of wrench to leave, even though the place is so huge and adorned that it makes him nervous. He has to hug Morgan a last ten times or so, and pinky swear to keep up their scheduled phone calls.

"You know I love you, kid," he says softly, ruffling her curls. They're standing outside the airport now, and she nods solemnly and gives him one more hug for the road.

Going through security alone after leaving his daughter behind is always a depressing experience, and by the time the plane touches down again he's miserable, and the only consolation of life is to get to the boarding kennel as fast as possible to rescue his dogs. Poor Kit pretty much always thinks that he's been left for real, but it's wonderful to disabuse him of that notion every time. He leads the pack in swarming around Will's legs, wagging,

pressing against him, and nosing his hands. He smiles for the first time in hours as he signs them out.

Field Trip

Abigail is very pleased to find out that Dad is calling Mr. Graham because he's supposed to be back today. Dad always checks that people have gotten back from trips all right, like when Aunt Chiyoh goes to Japan. Now he smiles when Mr. Graham answers, which is a very good sign. He asks him about Morgan's parents, who he turns out to have known a long time ago, and they talk about that kind of grownup stuff for a while as Abigail pours herself a glass of kompot. Dad makes it every winter, and Abigail is never sure which kind is her favorite. This batch of strawberry-blackberry-apricot is definitely one of the best, though.

Later that day Abigail calls Morgan, because she might need cheering up. Just in case, Abigail sings to her and gets Luna to meow into the phone, which makes her laugh. She's glad to be at home again, but of course she misses her dad. It'd be cool if they lived closer, but there's nothing to be done about that, and at least they'll get to hang out all summer, between camp and Morgan spending the rest of the summer with Mr. Graham.

"I'm so glad they like him!" Abigail says. "My parents can be so picky, but they're really friends. Dad called Mr. Graham to make sure he got back all right, he only does that when he really cares."

Visions of a summer with Morgan around are very helpful to Abigail in dragging her feet back to school. Even though Dad likes talking to Mr. Graham, he's a little slow on the first morning too. January is always hard, even though it means being so much closer to the end of the year than the beginning. At least it's warmer than it was, so the pets are back. Sky looks a little sleepy, but flutters and chirps when they came come in, which makes Mr. Graham look up. He looks pretty tired too, but he smiles when he sees them.

"Good morning, Will," Dad says, and Mr. Graham wishes him a good morning back. That's about all they have time for today, but it seems to cheer both of them up.

Today is all review because some kids forget everything over break. Abigail mostly remembers, but it's good to just sort of ease into math again instead of slamming right into the wall. Mr. Graham does give them homework, but not very much, and everyone only complains a little, a quiet grumble for the sake of form.

When Mom comes to get Abigail, she's still packing up, her whole quick ritual thrown off by the holidays. The murmur of their conversation makes a comforting backdrop, and when she comes out of the coatroom Mom is patting Mr. Graham's arm and thanking him again for helping pick out Luna. Abigail chimes in with her agreement, and then bounces out with Mom, pleased all over again at how well she and Luna are getting along.

Mom never had pets growing up, but she's so much like a cat that Abigail isn't surprised Luna likes her. Today the poor kitty comes running up to them in relief. They've been getting her used to being alone for longer and longer times, but she's still always glad when they come back. Abigail isn't sure if it's because she feels like she can't defend her vast territory alone, or if she just gets bored without them. Either way, she purrs thunderously as Abigail picks her

up, and Mom chuckles, gently scratching her behind the ears before going to the kitchen to put out Abigail's snack and Luna's second feeding of the day.

As January slowly rolls on, Luna falls into the rhythm of the school day. She remains delighted to see any of the family, but less nervous about it, which Abigail is glad to see. She also learns to come when called and to jump over and through obstacles on command. Mom and Dad applaud Luna's accomplishments, and Morgan enjoys the video that Abigail sends her.

The weather warms and turns everything into boring grey slush, so Abigail is even more interested than she would usually be when Mr. Graham passes out permission slips for a field trip.

"You need these signed by Wednesday if you're going," he says, making his way up and down the rows of desks. They put them in a circle or in little groups a lot of the time, but it's the end of the day and this way makes it harder for people to goof off or bother each other when they're supposed to be silently reading. "If you're not going, you get to hang out in the library and be good for Mrs. Buddish."

Abigail likes the library and all, but she gets Mom to sign it and give it back to Mr. Graham right after the bell, which makes him laugh. "Looking forward to it, huh?"

"Yeah!" Abigail chirps.

She probably gets to go to the science museum more often than most kids because Mr. Dolarhyde kind of works there, but she never gets tired of it. And more than one class is going, so Cindy will be there too. The combined effect is to make her wake up almost too excited to eat breakfast. Almost, because Dad's cooking is as good as ever.

Of course the start of the trip is a drag, the way it always is. They have to take attendance twice just in case anybody's dumb enough to lose themselves on the walk out to the bus, but they are sharing with Cindy's class. Abigail can sit next to her on the way, and walk her through everything when they get there, including the little permanent exhibit on nocturnal animals with film Mr. Dolarhyde took.

Valentine's Day

Hannibal is pleased to come home to a favorable report from Abigail. It was probably for the best not to offer to chaperone, but of course it gives him a bit of infatuated regret not to have seen harried, professional Will counting his students upon arrival, lunch break, and departure.

"We were mostly good," Abigail assures him, and he laughs, still carefully slicing bell pepper.

"I'm certain that you were, darling," he says.

"Daaad, we all were, not just me!" she cries, understanding him perfectly and only making him laugh again. She is becoming an able kitchen assistant, and beams when he tells her so over dinner. He'll be counting on her when it's time for Valentine's Day candy again. Abigail can only give her particular friends chocolate-dipped strawberry meringues if she brings enough for everyone, and Hannibal commits himself to the project every year

Simply to be polite, Hannibal has always made one for Abigail's teacher, and he's very glad of that precedent now. There's nothing at all weird in carefully piping a pale pink heart for Will and letting it bake and dry beside the others, and Abigail is actually the one who dips it. She's very slow, but she's getting a nice, even dip, setting each one onto a sheet of parchment paper to let the chocolate re-solidify.

"I think these are the best ones yet," she says, beaming at the finished batch. There's a little streak of chocolate on her face, and she grimaces but stands still for Hannibal to scrub it off.

"There. And yes, I think you're right," he says.

By the time they've cleaned up, everything has reached room temperature and can be prettily bagged up with leftover bake sale supplies for tomorrow. This year's cards are metallic pink with an embossed rose and simply wish the recipient a happy Valentine's Day. It's not strange at all to sign the one meant for Will, and Hannibal can send his daughter off with her little basket of seasonal cheer with a clear conscience.

Every year, Hannibal and Bedelia reserve a table for two at the same place, where they can tuck themselves into a quiet corner for a late dinner. They're very lucky to know the Freds, as they are generally referred to. Freddie's birthday is the twelfth, and their anniversary is the next week, so they make a tradition of staying in on one of the busiest date nights of the year and doing determinedly unromantic things like babysitting Abigail.

This year it's Freddie who answers the door, and she beams down at Abigail. "Hey, princess! Get any good candy this year?"

"Mr. Graham gave everybody a full-size peanut butter cup," Abigail informs her, slipping out of her rubber boots and padding into the house. "Except Sam, Sam can't have peanut anything. He got a chocolate marshmallow thing about as big, though."

"Sounds like a just and reasonable compromise to me," Freddie says, and smiles at Hannibal. "Go on, I know you don't have time to step in," she says, and Hannibal laughs.

"It's true. I know you'll take good care of Abigail," he adds, beginning to turn away.

"We will," Freddie says, and leaves the door open just enough so that Abigail can come back and wave. He returns the gesture and goes to rejoin Bedelia in the car.

It's like stepping into a hothouse, so warm against the evening chill and with Bedelia so much like a flower, fragrant and beautiful in her petal-pink gown. Even though they're running late, he takes the time to lean over the gearshift to kiss her. sighing into it and just lingering there for a long moment.

"We've never been late and we're not starting now," Bedelia murmurs against his lips, and Hannibal chuckles, sitting upright again and buckling his seat belt.

"No," he says, "we're not."

They arrive on time, and soon Bedelia is sipping her wine as they wait for their first course. It's overpriced, but the food is very good and Hannibal doesn't have to plan or cook it, which makes the whole thing more than worth it. Adding in the comfort and seclusion of their table, it makes a very good standing engagement, and the wine pours are very generous. Bedelia is slightly flushed by dessert, but still far from the point where she can't be trusted to make decisions anymore.

"Bedelia, dearest," Hannibal says, "would you mind if I called Will after this? I don't want to leave him alone today unless he wants us to."

Bedelia smiles. "I see no reason not to," she says, and takes another long sip. "Besides, I'm curious to see his lair."

Hannibal laughs. He has told her about Will's little house, some things kept as neatly as they would be aboard a ship, others carelessly scattered, and he has to wonder how she'll cope with it and all the dog hair. Being the copilot, Bedelia is the one to actually make the call, and she curls up like a half-blown rose as Hannibal drives.

"Good evening, Will," she says, her face going from watchful to animated the way it does when the other party answers. She listens and smiles with amusement. "Somehow I'm not surprised by that at all. Yes, that does help a bit. Hannibal and I were wondering if you'd like us to visit. We don't have to pick Abigail up for a while longer."

Many years, the two of them rent a hotel room for a few hours to realize one of Bedelia's more alarming fantasies, so there's plenty of time in the schedule for Hannibal to drive out to Will's when Bedelia relays his consent. After Bedelia hangs up, she laughs.

"He told me that he was literally eating a defrosted dinner out of a tin tray, but that it was at least made of real food."

"I hope he knows that we won't judge him," Hannibal says, exiting onto the rural route that will take them to the right area.

Valentine's Day II

Bedelia has a feeling that her presence will be a bigger deal than Hannibal's, from womanhood as much as novelty, and schools herself into as nonthreatening a frame of mind as she can manage as Hannibal makes his way out into the middle of nowhere. Will's house does look a bit like a boat on the ocean, and she smiles at the sight of it, a little cockleshell full of light in the dark. The porch looks very comfortable as Hannibal helps her up the steps. Bedelia could probably climb a tree in high heels, but she always appreciates the gesture.

There's a cacophony of barking and then the door opens, spilling out golden light and the sound of Will hushing his pack. Naturally, they are far too well-mannered to put their feet on Bedelia's dress, and she laughs as she lifts the long, full skirt to pick her way over the threshold.

"Hi, Will," she says softly, and puts a gentle hand on his shoulder for support as she slips out of her shoes.

Will is wearing a plaid flannel shirt and jeans, of course, and he looks at her like she's from another world. She smiles up at him, her hand still resting on the soft material, and he manages to smile back, looking as shy as ever.

"Hi," he manages as Hannibal quietly hangs both of their coats in the background. He has a freshly-scrubbed look, and she can tell that someone has been throwing things into better order. The floor plan is very open, and the large, low bed by the fireplace is neatly made with a plain blue cover that might actually be more flannel. She goes over to check, and Will just watches her get settled until Hannibal reaches over his shoulder to gently turn his face back and kiss him. He leans most of the way over Will's shoulder to meet him, and Bedelia smiles, admiring the way they look together.

"I guess I should be more hospitable," Will says, his voice a little husky, and he sits down beside Bedelia, leaning in to kiss her with a tentative hunger that melts her heart.

She cups his scruffy face in her hands and doesn't let up until he's relaxed and dreamy-eyed as he leans against her. Hannibal has made his unobtrusive way over to the bed and is sitting on the other side of Will when Bedelia breaks the kiss at last. And she smiles at him for a moment before she notices a few of the dogs watching curiously, and laughs. Hannibal joins in, and so does Will, a little weakly.

"I can lock them upstairs if we end up getting serious," he says, letting Bedelia lace their fingers together.

"There's no need for such extremity just yet," Hannibal says, kissing Will's cheek. "Tell me, Will, have you had dessert?"

"Nope, just the frozen tray," Will says, somewhere between amused and defiant.

"In that case," Hannibal says, standing up again, "I should make you some."

"Don't fight him on this," Bedelia adds, and Hannibal laughs.

"Sweets to the sweet, my darling, and you've already had some," he says, padding off to the kitchen on stocking feet. Soon there's the scent of melting chocolate from the kitchen, and Will chuckles.

"I was going to say, 'I can't believe that guy sometimes,' but then I realized that I can't believe either of you most of the time," he says, and Bedelia laughs, letting go of his hand to get to her feet.

"Unzip me?" she asks. "I have a full slip under this, I promise." She does, too, a fairly conservative peach thing that goes past her knees.

Will smiles, and carefully slides the zipper down, helping Bedelia keep her dress from falling to the floor. Apparently the slip is enough armor for his virtue, because he doesn't seem to suffer one of those surges of shyness as he scoops all that silk and tulle into his arms.

"The downstairs closet is as close to hair-free as this house gets," he says, and goes to hang her dress for her. Bedelia wanders into the kitchen to find Hannibal melting chocolate chips with peanut butter as an egg warms on the counter, and smiles.

"Miniature torte?"

"The ingredients presented themselves, and it's a combination I know Will likes," Hannibal says, removing the ingredients from the heat. Bedelia watches as he assembles everything and slides the full ramekin into a low oven. He works quickly, and is just shutting the door when Will comes back from the closet.

"Thanks for looking after my dress," Bedelia says, and kisses him softly.

"You're welcome," he says, and glances past her to Hannibal. "And thanks for dessert, it smells good already."

Hannibal beams at him, and a moment later Bedelia has the agreeable experience of being gently crushed between them as they kiss. Will makes a soft little whimpering noise and trembles. It intensifies as Bedelia slowly unbuttons his shirt from the bottom up, and Will pulls back from Hannibal's mouth and gasps as Bedelia slides her hands up under his shirt. She can't get over how perfectly smooth he is with that permanent stubble on his face, but he is. She smiles and runs her fingertips in gentle circles around his hard nipples as he gazes down at her with dilated eyes.

"You like that?" she asks, and Will nods.

"Y-yeah," he says, and lets Hannibal herd both of them back to the bed.

"Ten minutes plus cooling time until dessert," he says, and Will laughs breathlessly, sitting on the edge of the bed and then tipping onto his back and taking Bedelia with him. Hannibal settles on the foot of the bed to watch as Bedelia slowly strips Will to the waist, covering his

chest with kisses. He breathes like each one is a shock, and cries out when she turns one into a gentle bite.

Valentine's Day III

Buster barks at Will's sudden increase in noise, and he opens his eyes and forces himself to pull away from Bedelia and stand on shaky legs. His guests have the decency to just smile instead of laughing outright, and Will orders the whole pack upstairs, shutting them into Morgan's room and coming back down a moment later, feeling ridiculous with his tented jeans and flushed face. He feels a stupid urge to cover his chest like a girl, but fights it back and goes to Bedelia when she reaches for him.

"Now," she purrs, "where were we, dear?"

"You had just started biting me," he replies, and they both chuckle, Hannibal kissing Bedelia's neck before releasing her to nuzzle her soft, soft way in against his chest before she bites him again. Her small, sharp teeth fill Will with the urge to gather her tiny frame into his arms and hold her protectively even as she chews on him, like some tiny and vicious pet. When he actually does it, she coos and cuddles even closer, and Hannibal makes a quiet noise of satisfaction in his throat, stroking Bedelia's hair as she keeps biting Will. Each one hurts, but they're too light to leave serious marks. Will moans and then cries out again when she sucks one nipple into her mouth, just teasing the aching flesh with the edges of her teeth.

"Fffuck," Will whimpers, and clutches at her desperately, reminding himself not to hold on too hard and hurt her. She makes happy noises and keeps taking him apart at the seams as Hannibal gives them each a last pat and vanishes into the kitchen. For a moment Will wonders how much longer until Hannibal will interrupt them for dessert, but he loses track of time again almost immediately, and shakes all over as Bedelia trails her hair over his sensitized skin. "Ohhh," he breathes, and then lets out a pathetic little yelp as Bedelia nips him sharply, just over the ribs on one side before matching it on the other.

Will can't help a little quavery noise when she does, and then lets out a few more as she takes ruthless advantage of those weird little spots of sensitivity, and he just writhes and tries to keep breathing until she suddenly stops, looking up at Hannibal. They're both very kind about how long it takes Will's brain to shift gears even a little, because it turns out that Hannibal wants to hand-feed him.

"I would enjoy it very much," is what he says, and that's all it takes for Will to end up lounging back against Hannibal's chest, accepting delicate spoonfuls of chocolate peanut butter torte with unsweetened whipped cream. It's amazing enough to partially distract him from Bedelia carefully removing his pants. She takes her time about the process, and is very gentle with his sticky, aching cock and balls. Everything feels heavy, and the incidental touches of her tiny hands make him whimper and squirm. Hannibal starts talking in Italian, and she answers the same way. Will barely knows any, and just lets it wash over him as Bedelia gets him naked and Hannibal feeds him almost the entire little dish, rich as it is.

"That's enough," Will murmurs at last, and Hannibal sets the remaining torte aside.

"There," Hannibal purrs, "now you're almost taken care of."

"I'd say that was a big 'almost,' but I don't wanna sound egotistical," Will mutters, and Hannibal laughs and then nibbles his ear.

"It is, though," he whispers, and Will rolls his eyes, feeling his face flush even more.

"You're incorrigible," he says, and then bucks and gasps as Bedelia squeezes his cock with no warning or mercy. "Both of you are incorrigible," he corrects himself when he can speak again, and they both laugh.

"It's true," Bedelia says. "How shall we make it up to you?"

"God, I don't know," Will breathes as Hannibal delicately explores his ear with the pointed tip of his tongue. "I.. ah! I've been jerking off to everything we've already done about evenly."

"We do have condoms," Hannibal murmurs, pulling two out of his breast pocket.

"I'm not gonna last," Will admits, and Bedelia laughs.

"Why not fuck Hannibal," she says in that soft, clear voice that makes obscenities actually sound obscene, "while he fucks me?"

That way they'll be set up to take care of each other while Will watches, and he definitely can't turn that down. As it is he moves to the sidelines to catch his breath and get himself under control, kneeling at the foot of the bed as Bedelia helps Hannibal out of what seems like every piece of clothing in the western hemisphere. Will joins in to make it take less time, and then just stretches out beside them as Bedelia rolls onto her back, sweeping her hair out from under her shoulders before looping her arms around Hannibal's neck, smiling lazily up at him as he ruts along her for a few endless moments before his tip catches and he slides inside. Bedelia quivers and holds him more tightly as he sets up a slow, deep rhythm.

Will may generally be a sad loner, but he has real lube and not just hand lotion. He's incredibly grateful for that as he prepares a condom and rolls it on, slicking his fingers in the process. He prefers to use a little more finesse most of the time, but right now he just pushes two fingers into Hannibal. They fit just fine if the way he groans and grinds back on them is any indication. Will catches Hannibal's rhythm as he works to loose him up, and by the time he slides his fingers out and his cock in, it feels like all three of them are breathing together. Hannibal growls and Bedelia lets out high-pitched little gasps while Will tries not to wail, speeding up despite his best efforts not to.

Just as he knew he would be, Will is the first to come, letting out something that probably counts as a howl as he buries himself as deep in Hannibal as he can get. It snatches the breath out of him and for a long time he just lets himself drape over Hannibal, who doesn't seem at all inconvenienced by his weight. At last Will rolls to the side, though, to throw his condom away and then roll back in to kiss Bedelia as Hannibal wraps one hand around her throat. It looks huge there, and the careful, controlled squeeze he gives makes Will's heart pound. It's nowhere near enough to cut Bedelia's blood flow or air supply off, and she opens blissful, hazy eyes, looking over at Will as Hannibal pounds into her harder than Will would dare.

Spring Break

Mom and Dad don't pick Abigail up until late, but they always do on Valentine's Day. They tend to be tired, too, and Aunt Freddie always makes fun of them. This time Mom is so lazy-eyed she's almost asleep, and Dad seems to think everything is funny. At least they're happy if they have to be so weird, and they pay proper attention to the elaborate drawings Abigail and Freddie have made. Freddie says she can't draw, but she's actually pretty good. Uncle Rick really can't draw, but he always has good color suggestions, so Abigail gives him credit where it's due, like when Mom admires her use of Jungle Green for a panther's coat.

Abigail is almost as tired as the grownups, though, so she wraps up quickly. It's good to have Mom and Dad here to help her put her pictures away, because they're good at this kind of stuff. She gives Uncle Rick all of her Sweethearts because he actually likes them, the weirdo, and then takes Mom's hand for the walk out to the car, waving back at Freddie and Rick where they stand backlit in the doorway.

On the way home, Mom actually falls asleep! Usually no matter how tired she is she can stay at least sort of alert, but not this time. Abigail giggles at her, and Dad just smiles.

"I suppose I should wake her up. People will think she's hurt if I carry her inside," he says when they stop in the driveway.

"Probably," Abigail says, and then rolls her eyes as Dad does it with a kiss, like this is Sleeping Beauty or something. It does work, though. Mom blinks awake, smiles, and yawns, sleepily stepping out of the car and making her way up to the front door. Her high heels worry Abigail at times like this, but she makes it inside and then steps out of them, hugging Abigail before wandering upstairs.

It's technically Mom's turn, but Dad is more awake so he reads to Abigail while Mom showers and puts up her hair and takes off her makeup and all the extra girl stuff. She had a lot on tonight, Abigail is more than willing to give her the extra time. Dad reads her two books, and kisses her on the forehead as he tucks the blankets up around her neck.

"I love you," he says. "Sleep well."

"L've you too, Dad," Abigail mumbles, already half-asleep.

The thing about Valentine's Day is that the morning after is one of Abigail's favorites. Mom and Dad are always in a good mood, and from the fifteenth on, the year seems to pick up speed. February is grey and boring and slushy, but it's also short, and March comes in on a warm wind, with icy mornings and muddy afternoons. Abigail wears her rubber boots every day, and even Mom does, sometimes. Mom's are black with white piping and are almost elegant, of course. Abigail's are bright pink, with purple stars, and they almost glow against the mud.

Mr. Graham gets a little crabby near the end of March, but he's not really mean to anyone. He just seems like his shirt itches or he isn't getting enough sleep or something. Her classmates

have enough sense not to act up, and in return Mr. Graham doesn't give them much homework and shows them a whole movie about whales, where he usually doesn't like to have them sit and watch anything longer than twenty minutes or so.

Brooke wonders if Mr. Graham is getting sick, but he looks healthy enough to Abigail. She decides that she'll tell Morgan if he does get sick, though, even if it's just a cold. He doesn't get sick by spring break, anyway, and Abigail trots out with Mom into a glorious week off, the sun so bright it almost feels like summer already.

Apparently the mushrooms are coming out, too, because Mr. Stammets takes her out to pick them on the first day of the break. He's even weirder than her parents, but she likes him. He hides his picking bag in his shirt and always tells her to do the same, because mushrooms know you're there, and they'll hide if you're obviously out to get them. He says they're more like animals than plants, so this is more like hunting than gathering, and Abigail thinks that he might be right.

On their way home, Mr. Stammets actually gets a phone call, something Abigail has never seen before. He pulls over to talk to somebody named Katherine. He talks to her like she's a friend, too, not just somebody from work or whatever, and that's good. Mr. Stammets is alone too much.

Dad is napping when they get back, but Mom is up and dressed, and can help them clean and pat-dry everything. She always makes Dad look wild mushrooms over before she lets Abigail eat them, just like Halloween candy, so they can't immediately put some of them into omelets the way Abigail would prefer. Still, there's soup, and Mr. Stammets even stays to have some and talks to Mom almost like a regular person. Abigail is proud of him, and wonders if Mom knows anything about Katherine. She asks after Mr. Stammets leaves, and Mom just laughs, saying that Abigail's guess is as good as her own.

Valentine's Day IV

Hannibal supposes that he's being alarming, but he knows what Bedelia needs, and they have to start getting kinky in front of Will sometime. He doesn't seem frightened. Perhaps a little bit nervous, but more intrigued than anything. He watches the play of expression on Bedelia's face, and gently touches her humid skin, feeling what happens to her pulse when Hannibal holds it in his hand. He whimpers when Bedelia takes his fingertips into her mouth, but he lets her have them like the gentleman he is.

Hannibal smiles, and cranes his neck to kiss Will's shoulder because it's the nearest convenient part of him before returning all his focus to the task at hand. He has been making Bedelia come for decades, and it has never once ceased to interest him. The smaller, slower ones take her like sleep, and the more explosive really are like small deaths. There are a thousand different ways for her eyes to change, going blank or preternaturally sharp, rolling back into her head or gazing straight up at him like there is nothing else, and he loves every single variation.

Now he shifts his grip on her throat, using his elbow to take most of his own weight and allow his other hand to find her clit, rolling the pad of his thumb over and over it until Bedelia lets out a soundless cry, her nails tearing at his back as she pulses around him so long and so hard that she pulls him over the edge as well, drawing a low moan out of his chest as he ruts mindlessly into her. In the silence afterward he covers her throat with tiny kisses, chuckling as she offers Will a hand with his present bashful masturbation.

"It's endearing," she tells him, and Hannibal turns to look when Will lets out a soft moan. There's a little quaver to the sound, and something so sweet about the way his long-lashed eyes sweep shut that Hannibal has to kiss him again, on the same scarred shoulder as before. This arm is always a little stiff, and Hannibal feels a surge of helpless tenderness toward it, limning the old injury with his lips as Bedelia learns just the right stroke to make Will whimper and shake, so close already.

When Will comes, he cries out and a light flush spreads across his chest. He almost glows, gorgeous in that way that makes Hannibal's fingers itch to draw him. Bedelia smiles, shifting closer so she can kiss him on the forehead, and Hannibal sits up to find cleaning supplies before she can ask, since a handful of untested semen must be dealt with clinically.

Neat as so much of the house is kept, Hannibal isn't surprised to find clean washcloths and disinfectant. He has to make a detour to the kitchen for something to hold hot water, but soon he can return to the bed and start washing Bedelia's hand. Will rests with closed eyes, and doesn't resist when Hannibal moves on to cleaning him. Bedelia tenderly washes Hannibal while he takes care of Will, and he chuckles.

"Thank you, light of my eyes," he purrs, and she just smiles.

The three of them rest together for a while, all damp, clean skin and quiet breathing, Bedelia cuddled in on side of his chest, and Will on the other. It's probably only about fifteen minutes

until Will blinks and mutters, "Ssshit, what time is it?"

Hannibal raises his head to look into the kitchen. "Your stove says eleven-fifteen."

"It's usually right," Will murmurs, big blue eyes still so hazy. "M I makin' you late?"

Hannibal laughs. "This time last year i was still cleaning stage blood out of a hotel bathtub, this is fine." Will will have to learn what kind of freaks he's dealing with at some point, and the present moment seems like a good one.

"...Stage blood?" he mutters.

"Bedelia is very imaginative," Hannibal coos, "aren't you, darling?"

She chuckles. "Don't most people enjoy a certain amount of simulated murder?"

"I knew you guys were kinky," Will mutters, sounding both resigned and fond. "And it's not like I'm not."

"We have had more than a few inklings of that, yes," Hannibal says, and Will laughs. There's a plaintive whine from upstairs, and Will rolls his eyes.

"God, I don't wanna get up."

"I can go get them," Hannibal offers, and extricates himself when Will sighs his thanks, making no move to rise and do it himself.

Hannibal kisses Will on the forehead and then Bedelia before padding upstairs. It's warm enough that he doesn't need anything but his skin, and it's easy to find the right door with the faint light and sense of canine aliveness gathered in Morgan's room. The dogs are pleased to see Hannibal, and don't say a word about his nakedness as they surge up to him to be stroked before charging downstairs in search of their master.

Hannibal lingers in the doorway for a moment, gazing into the room that is Morgan's when it belongs to anyone. It's plain, of course, and not full of the detritus of uninterrupted girlhood like Abigail's is, but the walls and ceiling are plastered with vivid posters of wild animals in beautiful landscapes, Will making his daughter welcome with this wide choice of vistas in which to lose herself. Hannibal smiles, and switches off the small lamp that had kept the dogs from being in complete darkness, and shuts the door, making his way back down the stairs.

Will is sitting up on the edge of the bed, scratching Kit behind the ears and murmuring nonsense to him while Bedelia sprawls at her languid ease and lets the smallest dog sniff her hair. A glance at the stove clock lets him know that it's not half-past eleven yet, and he smiles, sitting beside Will and leaning over to kiss his cheek.

"I should probably take these guys out one more time," Will says, and Hannibal smiles.

"May I join you?"

"Sure." He glances over at Bedelia, and she waves her hand at him.

"I despise the cold," she murmurs, a little slurred with fatigue on top of wine. Hannibal ranges over her to kiss her on the mouth, lingering over it for a long moment before standing again and going in search of his clothes.

Spring Break II

Bedelia dozes off as she waits for the others to get back, and only really comes half-awake when Hannibal strokes her hair and the side of her face, murmuring her name. He coaxes her to sit up and put on her slip as Will vanishes and reappears with her dress draped across his arms, looking slightly terrified to be touching it. Bedelia smiles at him, and lets Hannibal help her up and into it.

She shuffles out to the car almost sleepwalking, and can't help a noise of discontent at the cold of the night outside. Will laughs at her, but gently, and helps Hannibal walk her down the steps. This tired she loses some of her expertise on heels, and is glad of the assistance. Standing beside the running car, Bedelia rises onto her tiptoes to kiss Will, slow and deep and tender, and he sighs, wrapping his arms around her and holding her close.

"Goodnight," she whispers, and he says the same in return, holding the door for her as she climbs into the car.

Hannibal spends a moment to give Will a kiss of his own, but soon he's inside, humming an operatic passage that she can't place. Bedelia is glad that their child is too young to recognize the obvious signs of afterglow, because Hannibal is positively beatific. She dozes off on the way to collect Abigail, and again on the way home. Hannibal wakes her with a kiss to walk her inside, and takes her shift reading to Abigail. Bedelia barely has the strength to shower, and falls asleep as soon as she crawls into bed.

In the morning Hannibal is still glowing, and Bedelia has to assume that she is as well. Abigail is just happy that they're happy, of course, and in the days that follow, her temper is as sunny as the weather. March is bright and deceptive this year, the afternoons making people think that it's summer already. It's the kind of spring that makes everyone feel restive and young, even Bedelia herself.

When she comes into the classroom in the afternoons to pick up Abigail, Will is very polite and very contained, always intent upon paperwork. Bedelia understands. He's hot-blooded like Hannibal, and enough younger than it matters. More than once she thinks of a little dark-coated satyr when she looks at him, a wild thing torn between wariness and lust. As he should, he lets the wariness win out on school time and property, but there is one Wednesday near the break when his desk is clear and he's leaving at the same time they are, right after the last bell.

"Meet us for coffee?" she asks, and Will blinks at her and then smiles, just a little.

"Okay. Riverside?"

Riverside is the only coffee shop in the neighborhood besides a completely featureless Starbucks, and Bedelia nods as Abigail makes a small and joyful noise at the prospect of hot chocolate or a steamer. Bedelia is determined not to let Will feel awkward, and beats him to the cafe so that when he arrives, she can wave him over to their table, already claimed with Abigail's clutter.

Will seems to be calmed by the presence of their childish chaperone, and they talk like adults, about the weather and the remaining school schedule, and their nebulous plans for the summer. Will apparently spends a lot of his free time fishing, which makes sense with what Bedelia knows of him. Angling is so quiet, so soothing. Listening to him talk about stargazing in the wilderness, Bedelia has to wonder if he'll be enough to induce her to go camping for the first time in at least a decade.

Abigail sips her white cocoa and draws a spaceship, among other things. She gives the ship to Will when they leave, and he takes it with a respectful gravity that makes Bedelia want to rain kisses upon his stubbly little face. She settles for a smile and a wave, holding the door open for Abigail to go skipping out into the sunlight.

That night, Bedelia isn't surprised to get a call from Will, and she laughs, wishing she had a cord to twirl in her fingers as she talks to Will. Unchaperoned, she lets him know that she and Hannibal will find some activity for Abigail on Saturday. "I'm not sure what just now," she says, "but Hannibal and I will think of something."

In the end they think of Eldon Stammets, who is quietly pleased to have company on his mushroom hunts. Bedelia hesitates in general to let her child go off alone with adult males, but Eldon is, in his strange way, very paternal with Abigail. Bedelia has the feeling that he'd rather die than let her come to any harm, and he's very good at not frightening her. They leave at ten am., and Hannibal doesn't call Will until another half hour has gone by, getting Eldon and Abigail out of the neighborhood.

Will rings their doorbell at a little past eleven, and looks both joyful and harassed at once when Bedelia lets him in. "Hi," he says, leaning back against the closed door and giving her a shy and furtive smile. She smiles back, and steps up into his space, rising on her toes and tugging him down to give him a slow, hard kiss, with just a suggestion of teeth. He sighs and sags into it a little, gathering her close with a refreshing lack of deference.

"Good morning, Will," she murmurs, releasing his mouth at last.

"Morning," he whispers, and kisses her again. Hannibal emerges from the kitchen during this one, and Bedelia can feel him just watching for a long moment before he comes padding up in his socks to wrap his arms around her and on to Will. Will must not have sensed him, because he jumps, just a little, and then relaxes, recognizing Hannibal's hands on his back.

Spring Break III

Will feels like a complete failure as an adult, but there's no way to pretend he wants anything other than what happens, the pair of them sweeping him upstairs to their bed. Will lets Hannibal undress him like a doll, trembling at each and every incidental touch. His skin seems to cry out for both of them, and he lets out a real cry when Bedelia pinches his nipples with tender, vicious hands.

"I know that our trysts have fallen into the beginning of a pattern," Hannibal murmurs, ranging over Will and palming his inner thigh, "but I was wondering if I might introduce a variation."

"You mean you want to fuck me instead of the other way around?" Will asks, and bites his lip as Bedelia pinches him again before working her head between them to comfort one nipple with lips and tongue. "Ohhhfuck... I'm not against the idea," he breathes, "I'm just tense all over. It'll take a while."

"We have a while," Hannibal tells him, and kisses him long and slow before sitting up to get rid of his own clothes and find the lube.

Bedelia stays with Will, kissing and sucking on him, delicate, lush mouth busy on his skin. She doesn't move to do anything about her own pale gold house dress. The material rustles as he wraps his arms around her, pulling her even closer. She sighs and kisses Will, as soothing as it is erotic. Her hand in his hair is all soothing, and he sighs, leaning into it.

"It's all right," she coos, "we have time."

"I guess so," Will says softly, and she smiles down at him.

"I think that I'm mostly going to watch this time," she says, and on that cue Hannibal returns to them. Bedelia slips out of Will's arms and moves away, vanishing into the armchair as Hannibal stretches himself over the length of his body to kiss him until he's dizzy with it, hands uselessly clutching at Hannibal's back.

"So beautiful," Hannibal mumbles, sucking at the skin over Will’s pulse.

He's probably leaving a mark, but Will lets him, tipping his head back to give Hannibal better access. There's time for it to heal before school gets back in session, and Hannibal's teeth right where they are feel like something he never knew he needed. He moans and goes limp under Hannibal as he bites harder, and his thighs tremble as Hannibal reaches between them with slick fingers. He reminds himself to fucking stay relaxed, and then jumps and tenses at the first light touch to his hole.

Hannibal chuckles and bites him again. "It's all right, Will," he says softly, and Will relaxes just that tiny bit.

Worrying about being too tight always makes it worse, so Will concentrates on the taste of Hannibal's mouth as he kisses him again, relaxing a little into those gently nudging fingertips. Hannibal rubs a slow circle and keeps kissing Will nearly breathless, but after a while, Will can't help but feel their definite lack of progress. Hannibal must feel it too, and Will's skin prickles with humiliation as he sits back and looks over at Bedelia.

"Do we have the proper barrier, beloved?" he asks, and apparently they do, because she hands him something. Will puts his forearm across his eyes, opening his legs as Hannibal settles down between them.

"You suck me off, I'm not gonna last long enough for anything else," Will mumbles, and Hannibal just chuckles.

There's a press of cool, lubed latex against his hole, and Will lets out a little yelp of panic that turns into a gasp at the completely unexpected touch of Hannibal's pointed tongue. It glides over Will the way his fingers had, and he whines, shaking as Hannibal guides his legs up over his shoulders, where Will can dig his heels into Hannibal's back as he licks into him, making obscene little moaning noises against his flesh.

As Hannibal works deeper and deeper, Will's hips tremble and he can feel himself opening up, relaxing more than he ever would have thought that he could. He feels like his mind is melting in Hannibal's mouth, and lets out a breathless, hysterical little laugh followed a long, loud moan and then another. Hannibal rumbles, eating Will out like there's nothing he would rather do. He loosely grips Will's cock and balls with one hand, but it's more to hold them out of the way than for its own sake, and the lack of real attention to them is maddening. Will whines and wriggles, feeling himself pulse in Hannibal's hand.

"Feeling more relaxed, Will?" Hannibal murmurs, pulling that filthy mouth away just enough to speak.

"Y-yes," Will breathes, "fuck yes..."

Hannibal chuckles, and tosses the dental dam away, shifting further up the bed to put a kiss right over Will's hammering heart. "Good," he croons, and works his first two fingers into Will with no trouble at all. It's quick after that, Will just clinging to Hannibal and letting himself open up, voicing each desperate exhale as Hannibal slowly, caressingly eases his cock into him, gentle, slippery, and soft. When Will can actually open up for it, he loves to get fucked, and now he melts under Hannibal, clinging with arms and legs and leaving everything up to him.

Hannibal cradles the back of Will's head in his hand, keeping him close and holding him protectively. He grinds as deep into Will as he can, forcing long, breathy cries up from his throat. Will always forgets the way this takes him until he's doing it again, relaxing enough to let someone move inside him without hurting him. Hannibal times it well, driving himself to the edge before gripping Will's cock and stroking him into a cataclysmic orgasm that leaves his ears ringing and his vision greyed out as Hannibal shakes and buries himself as deeply into Will as he can get. They stay like that for a long time afterward, and Will is comforted by the weight of Hannibal pressing him into the mattress.

A Friend For Mr. Stammets

Dad takes his sweet time about getting up, the way he always does when he takes naps, but at long long last there can be mushroom omelets for dinner, and Dad can listen all about picking them. Mom listens, but she doesn't actually go mushroom-hunting, so she doesn't know the exact places and tiny landmarks that inform so much of a morning's work. Dad asks all kinds of questions about the hunt, and it's only after dinner when the dishes are done and they're setting up the chessboard that Abigail thinks to ask him about Mr. Stammets's friend.

"I don't want to be nosy," she adds, "but Mr. Stammets never has friends."

"I like to think of myself as a friend to Mr. Stammets," Dad says, and Abigail laughs.

"Sure, you and Mom are, and he talks to Aunt Freddie, but he never has any *other* friends, and this one is a girl."

"This one is a girl," Dad concedes, carefully putting the black queen onto her color.

"Do you think she's a friend-friend or a girlfriend?" Abigail asks, lining up the white pawns.

Dad laughs. "It's hard to say with Mr. Stammets, but I am inclined toward the latter."

"Seriously?" Abigail isn't sure whether to be happy or grossed out. On the one hand, Mr. Stammets is so lonely that he doesn't even know it half the time, but on the other hand he's Mr. Stammets and the thought of him kissing anybody is weird and gross. "Wow....Does she really like mushrooms?"

Dad smiles at her. "She does not dislike them, and she keeps bees, so she'll understand when he starts talking about fields of mycelium and how they work together."

"Bees are about as cool as fungus," Abigail says, and settles in to play her doomed game against Dad. He's so good that these are really just teaching exercises, most of the time, but they're still fun. She lasts a really long time, compared to her average, and she's proud of herself for how much effort it takes Dad to beat her.

The next morning they go out for mushrooms again, but this time Dad and even Mom come along. It's always funny to see Dad in jeans and boots and a work shirt, and beyond funny to see *Mom* in jeans and boots. She looks pretty in them, of course, but it's very strange to see. She spends most of her time sitting on the blanket and watching over the picnic basket. Mr. Stammets never brings more than some trail mix or something so Abigail won't get too hungry, but of course Dad always packs a nice lunch.

Like every break from school, spring break goes by way too fast, a whirl of spending the night with Cindy, hunting mushrooms, and sending Morgan pictures of Luna. It doesn't help that as soon as school gets back in, they have to take their stupid standardized tests. Abigail hates them because they're boring, but she does also get a lot of time to draw and read, since not even the dumb kids need all the time they're given. She draws Luna flying a spaceship,

with herself and Morgan visible through the passenger windows. At least with this whole week of tests, that just leaves five weeks until the last day of school. Abigail is marking them off on her calendar, because Mr. Graham is nice and all, but she is more than ready for school to be over.

Mom laughs when Abigail says so. "I must agree with you, dear," she says, and changes the radio station because neither of them wants to hear a commercial for mattresses. "You'll need to dress for dinner tonight, Abigail, Mr. Stammets is bringing Ms. Pimms over for dinner."

Usually Abigail is free to come to the table in her pajamas if she's more comfortable that way, but they expect her to make some effort for guests. She doesn't mind, today. She's curious about Ms. Pimms and hasn't had any real excuse to wear the dress Mom got her for Christmas. She says as much, and Mom laughs.

"I'm glad to provide you with an occasion at last, dear," she says, and takes the last turn before their street. "I hope you don't mind if Mr. Graham visits us in the summer," she adds. "We've gotten rather fond of him."

Abigail laughs. "I can see that, Mom. And no, I don't mind him at all."

Mom seems happy with that, and hums while she fetches Abigail's snack for her. There's time to get some homework done before she needs to scurry upstairs and get into her dress. She does it quickly, so that Mom can't object to putting a few curls into her hair on the basis of time. There's no point in getting really fancy for a dinner at home, but Abigail likes to add little flourishes when she can. Mom understands, and has very good advice about scarf colors.

Dad compliments her when she comes down, and has her set the table for him. She uses the sorta-good plates that have fruit on them. The everyday plates are white, and the really good ones are real blue willow. These might actually be Abigail's favorite. There's something cheerful about them.

Mr. Stammets shows up right on time, as always, and he opens Ms. Pimms's door for her, a definite point in his favor and in favor of the whole 'girlfriend' angle. Ms. Pimms has blonde hair turning grey and doesn't bother to paint it. She's pretty in a flyaway kind of way, like someone who spends way more time tending her hives than herself. Abigail likes her immediately, even if she swiftly turns out to be about as weird as Mr. Stammets. Still, that makes them a perfect match, and Bee Facts are interesting. Mr. Stammets actually looks comfortable, too, and that's nearly unprecedented.

The Second To Last Day Of School

Hannibal is a patient man, but as spring heats up toward summer, he feels his patience dwindling, like a body of water drying up. He works out more than usual, and does breathing exercises during the breaks in his day. He even meditates a little, doing his utmost to focus his mind on something other than tracking Will down and pouncing on him. Sometimes it helps.

"Be strong, beat of my heart," Bedelia tells him when he calls her during his lunch break, feeling like someone reaching out to their AA sponsor.

"How many days are left, Bedelia?"

"Twelve school days, darling. Turn on the air-conditioning and think about pharmokinetics."

The air-conditioning is already on, and thinking about pharmokinetics can only help so much. Hannibal just counts the days and reminds himself that these things build character. At least Abigail is too delighted with the rapid approach of summer vacation to notice anything odd about her parents.

Usually Hannibal and Bedelia don't play with any of her really scary fantasies under the same roof as Abigail, for obvious reasons, but during the last week of school, on a day when Abigail is particularly tired and Hannibal is particularly frustrated, he gets the practice knives out. One of them, anyway, and he makes sure to lock the door before he ambushes Bedelia on her way out of the bathroom.

"Green," she whispers, trembling as he sets the black rubber edge against her throat.

He sighs, and just breathes in her scent for a long moment. He keeps the blade where it is, his other hand gripping Bedelia's hair as he herds her to the bed. She moves like the knife at her throat is real, like the slightest slip of his hand will spill her blood everywhere, and he loves her for it. Bedelia settles on her back, putting her wrists over her head in a way that lets Hannibal know just how much she misses the cuffs.

"Soon," he promises, and kisses her, the knife still at her throat. He pushes her nightgown up over her breasts and just plays with her for a while, trailing the blade over her flawless skin, dragging a red line down her inner thigh and making her whimper and shake. Hannibal finally sets his knife aside to grip Bedelia's throat with one hand, sliding three fingers of the other into her. He stretches her wide, and kisses her to swallow up a moan that would be too loud unmuffled.

Hannibal manages to hold off until Bedelia comes, but the second her hips are still enough he pushes into her, burying his whole length in one rough thrust that makes her tip her head back and pant, clenching tightly at him when he puts his hand on her throat again. He kisses her to keep her quiet, and pounds into her as hard as he can without hitting the headboard on the wall. He manages to hold on until Bedelia comes again, and then it's hopeless, and he has to bite the pillow to quiet a low cry.

More than anything, they both want to just lie here, but of course Hannibal leaps up as soon as his legs will hold him. He washes himself and the knife, and puts it away in a very uninteresting shoebox in the very top shelf of the closet, where all the scary toys are kept before he unlocks the door, in case Abigail needs anything in the night. By the time he's done with that, Bedelia can wobble to the bathroom to clean herself up, and then back to bed to tuck herself under Hannibal's arm, her head resting on his chest.

"Two days," she murmurs, on the edge of sleep, and Hannibal laughs, utterly relaxed for the moment.

"Two days, light of my eyes," he murmurs, and strokes her hair.

In the morning Abigail is full of energy and joy. Schoolwork has been getting steadily more trivial as the year winds down, and the second-to-last day of school hardly counts. Hannibal takes a deep breath, and walks Abigail in to her classroom the way he has all year. Will has the bright blue budgie perched on his finger, having some kind of conversation with her in whistles. The bird flutters her wings when they come in, but regains her composure and sidles along Will's hand to regard them with a bright, black eye. Abigail beams, and moves slowly to put her things in order for the day. Will stands and puts the bird back in her cage, scrubbing his hands with disinfectant wipes.

"Good morning, Will," Hannibal says, and Will smiles. He looks a little feverish, and Hannibal has no ulterior motive when he reaches out to touch his face. Will is a little warm, but not too much. He chuckles, and squirms a little.

"Am I gonna live, doctor?"

"I think you'll pull through," Hannibal says, wanting more than anything to kiss him.

He sees his own thoughts flicker in Will's eyes, and steps back. Will looks thwarted and grateful at the same time, and then nothing but professional as Abigail comes bounding out of the coatroom. She's full of the final day festivities, of course, and extracts a promise from Hannibal to make a dish for her to bring even if he has to work.

"Maybe something healthy?" Will adds. "We get a lot of desserts."

"I'll have to see what I can do," Hannibal says, and takes his leave before he can do anything stupid. Outside he stands in the warm sun and catches his breath. Everything smells green, the trees covered in a glowing haze of tiny new leaves, and Hannibal is filled with the urge to strip his jacket off and vault over the playground fence to climb the jungle gym. He does not do this, of course. He takes another deep breath of green, spring air, and walks back to his car.

The Last Day Of School

Ever since they settled here, Hannibal has taken an anthropologist's joy in making things that their neighbors will eat, so Bedelia isn't surprised to end up stashing an enormous bowl of pasta salad in her work fridge. At least the kids will probably be too excited to notice if Bedelia undresses Will with her eyes. She can't hope for so much obliviousness from the other parents, and reminds herself again and again to behave as she drives to the school. It's the last day, there's no reason reason to blow it now. She tells herself this over and over, and after she parks, she takes a moment to touch up her makeup and breathe deeply before lugging her plastic bowl inside.

Somehow Bedelia is not surprised to find all the children wearing monster masks made of construction paper. Abigail's is purple, and possessed of an impressive set of antlers, as well as some feather trim. Bedelia greets her with a hug and a compliment on her sartorial choices.

"That is a lovely mask, darling! Whose idea were the antlers?"

"Billy suggested them when I didn't want horns or antennae, aren't they great?" She beams up at Bedelia, clearly full of sugar and excitement.

"They are," she says, and makes her way to the back table where all the food is piled up, and Will is helping a small blue monster to a piece of cake.

"There you go," he says.

The monster chirps, "Thanks, Mr. Graham!" and scampers away with its loot. Bedelia smiles, and starts looking for a clear space. Will moves some chips and dip over, and Bedelia sets Hannibal's contribution into the opening.

"Thanks," she says, and Will smiles.

"You're welcome."

Standing around and making polite small talk with Will, surrounded by children, is nearly unbearable. But Bedelia takes a kind of masochistic pleasure in keeping herself under such tight control. Will is particularly adorable today, taking advantage of the year's end carnival atmosphere with a pair of torn jeans and a Batman t-shirt. It makes him look both years younger than he is, and positively edible. Bedelia wonders if her attraction to such boyishness is part of some kind of midlife crisis. All she can be sure of is that her mouth aches for his skin, and she has to barely pacify it with so much pasta salad that she'll have no appetite for dinner.

Abigail is of course almost manic with joy, pinwheeling around the room to compare monster masks, devour sweets, and exchange contact information with a few friends. It's nice to see her so happy, even if Bedelia is roasting in the flames of her own personal hell. She's entirely too sober for this, and the small Bota Box in her purse can only do so much to help. Still, it does take the edge off to duck into one of the restrooms and sip a glass's worth. When she

comes back, Will has called the class to some kind of order, and is going from one child to the next with a paper sack of what turns out to be animal-shaped erasers in various neon colors. He patiently lets each child take their choice, and then wishes them a wonderful summer.

Bedelia dutifully admires Abigail's glowing-orange starfish eraser, and collects the empty bowl, wondering if her heartbeat is audible to the entire room. Will is helping children collect their things and doing his best to engage in small talk with various parents, so Bedelia hangs back, aided by Abigail's big collection of finished work. It takes her a while to gather up science posters and art projects, and the room empties as she does. Will gives Bedelia a slightly hunted smile-.

"Hannibal and I are looking forward to seeing you this summer," she says, and Will goes faintly pink.

"Yeah," he says, and then turns to Abigail, hoping that she enjoys her vacation and does well in fourth grade. She beams and shakes his hand, and then bounds out the door. Bedelia kisses her fingertips and just touches Will's lips for a moment before following Abigail out into the hall, and on into the blazing sunlight of the first real day of summer.

All the way home, Abigail is full of her plans for the vacation. It's only a week until she goes to Greenwater, and for once that doesn't seem cruelly short. Still, Bedelia will miss the child, and listens attentively, agreeing that Cindy's hospitality must be repaid when Abigail gets back from camp.

Luna comes up to greet them as usual, and Abigail lavishes her with affection as Bedelia washes the bowl and tries to believe that this interminable school year is actually over. Abigail is out of Will's class, and the field is open at last. Bedelia feels sort of like dancing and a lot like driving directly to Will's house, but she stays quiet, finishes her wine, and opens a bottle to share with Hannibal when he gets back. She sips her first glass very slowly, lounging on the couch as Abigail puts her things away and then plays with the cat. There's no homework to oversee for the next three months, and Bedelia basks in that knowledge until Hannibal comes home. He has that slightly crazed glint in his eye, but is very attentive as Abigail tells him all about the festivities and shows him her starfish eraser.

After dinner, when Abigail is deeply involved in a book, Bedelia steps out into the backyard and calls Will. It takes him a moment to answer, and she can hear his smile.

"Hey," he says softly.

Bedelia smiles, watching the very first stars come out, sunset still coloring the horizon. "I was just wondering what teachers get up to on the last day of school."

Will chuckles. "This one goes out to dinner with Beverly Katz, and then sits around tying flies, wondering if either half of the gorgeous married couple that are interested in him for some reason are going to call."

"We have a lot of reasons," Bedelia purrs. "But we're too responsible to leave our child alone. We are not too responsible to invite you over for a drink, however. Sometime between nine

and ten, perhaps?" Abigail is usually asleep by half-past ten, and sound doesn't carry very far down the hall.

The First Night Of Summer

Will takes a deep breath as he nears the Lecter-Du Maurier residence, and reminds himself that now it's summer, and he can get as close to Abigail's parents as everyone likes. He shivers, runs a hand through his hair, and pulls into their driveway. He gets out of the car and walks up past the topiary, starting to grow out of its heart shape. He stands by the door for a long moment before knocking.

Hannibal answers, barefoot and smiling, his hair tousled. "Good evening, Will," he says softly, and Will takes a second glance down, eyes drawn by unwonted color.

"Are your toenails silver and green?"

"They are! Doesn't Abigail have lovely taste?" he asks, letting Will in and taking his jacket. This time he's definitely leaning in to smell him, but Will is past being put off by it.

"She does. Are you her art project for the night?"

"Hers and her mother's, she needed a little help for the more delicate bits."

"I see." Will follows him into the living room, where Abigail is seated on the floor, industriously painting Bedelia's toenails a bright purple that Will knows she wouldn't choose for herself.

"Hi, Mr. Graham!" she chirps, barely looking up from her work.

Bedelia smiles languidly, fluttering the fingers of one hand in greeting, the others holding a glass of red wine. Will smiles, and settles on the couch, surprised at how nervous he isn't. Hannibal pads away and returns with a glass in each hand. Will doesn't know much about wine, but he knows good from bad, and this is very good. He sips it slowly, and talks about opera with Bedelia, letting Will fade into the background the way he wants to. He knows even less about opera than he does about wine, and is happy to be educated after a long year of teaching.

Abigail's questions and commentary are also enlightening, and she's still asking Hannibal about 'The Girl Of The Golden West' as he leads her upstairs to put her to bed. Bedelia just blows her a kiss, since getting up would smear her polish. Abigail blows one in return and scampers the rest of the way up the stairs. Bedelia watches her go, and then smiles at Will. "You should come closer," she says, and Will rises, crossing over to her chair and sitting on the wide, sturdy arm.

"Hannibal will complain if he sees you there," Bedelia says, and pulls Will down to kiss him, her tiny hands cupping his face. It starts off firm but chaste, mostly closeness and perfume, but the she licks her way into his mouth like he's something delicious, and he can't help a quiet little whimpering noise. "You always sound so hungry," Bedelia murmurs, her lips just brushing his. "I wonder if we can help with that."

"I think it's just how I am," Will murmurs, and kisses her the way he wanted to this afternoon, like he has all the time in the world.

She melts into his arms and pushes his shirt up with one hand, the other slipping under to reach higher, rubbing a slow circle on one nipple before giving it the kind of slow and vicious pinch that makes Will lose track of the kiss entirely, moaning as quietly as he can. Bedelia nibbles at his jawline and then bites his neck, pinching the other side and making him shudder and whine.

"You have such a strange beauty," she says, gazing up at his face like she's trying to memorize it.

"Thanks, I think," Will whispers, and Bedelia chuckles.

"You know, we should be kinder to the furniture," she says, and coaxes him off the arm of the chair to sit in it properly.

She sits in his lap, and gently kicks her feet to try and fan-dry the polish, intermittently craning her neck to kiss him over her shoulder, making small purring noises into his mouth. She takes his hesitating hands and puts them on her breasts, making a small and happy noise as Will gropes her through the thin fabric of her house dress. In the comfort of her own home she's not wearing a bra, and Will cups each perfect handful, kneading gently. It's easy to lose track of time like this, and Hannibal sneaks up on them, leaning over the back of the chair to kiss the top of Will’s head and to slide his hands along Will's arms until he can guide his hands, showing him exactly how Bedelia likes to be touched.

"Shall we take this upstairs?" he murmurs, and Bedelia nods.

"Yes," Will whispers, when he realizes that they're waiting for him, and he helps Bedelia stand up, her toenails dry now.

Hannibal offers him a hand up, and then doesn't let go, towing him along as Bedelia grabs the wine bottle and leads the way up the stairs. All of them are very quiet, and no one speaks until they're in the master bedroom with the door locked behind them. Will is starting to feel painfully confined in his jeans, and he wriggles out of them, toeing off his socks and tossing his shirt onto a chair. Hannibal helps Bedelia with her house dress. They're beautiful together, glowing in the golden light of their little bedside map, exchanging lazy kisses until Hannibal has undone enough of the buttons for Bedelia to step out of it. There's nothing under it at all, and Will can't help a small, nameless noise in his throat.

Hannibal looks over at him and grins, beckoning him with one hand as the other lets Bedelia go so that she can stretch out on her back on the bed, watching as Hannibal kisses Will breathless, hands sliding down his back to grip his ass. Will shudders, and lets Hannibal guide him over Bedelia. He covers her in kisses while Hannibal finds a condom for them, and then shudders as Hannibal reaches around and rolls it onto him, giving him a friendly squeeze and then pulling back to lie beside Bedelia as Will sinks into her. It's weird to feel so desperate but to be so willing to go slowly.

For a while he just sits there, letting her feel him, and then just barely draws back before pressing in again. Hannibal reaches between them to rub Bedelia's clit in the same lazy tempo, stroking her into a hard, slow climax that makes her clutch at Will and pulse around him. He pants and bites his lip, shocked not to come along with her. He jumps as Hannibal grabs his ass again, but then relaxes, moaning quietly when lubed fingers start to rub a slow circle on his hole.

"Sorry," Hannibal murmurs, "but I have to get more involved."

"Please," Will mutters, and maybe it's the wine or being so wound up before Hannibal even starts or both, but this time it's easy to open up, panting and rocking into Bedelia just a little because he can't bear to keep still.

Hannibal kisses his neck and murmurs encouragement as he works three fingers into Will, and then his cock slides in, so thick but not hurting, and Will can't even move now, mouth hanging open as he lets Hannibal in. Hannibal sets up a rhythm of his own, and Will just whimpers and melts, letting Hannibal drive him into Bedelia as he sees fit. Both of them pet and praise him, pressing wet, biting little kisses to his neck, shoulders, and chest.

"Fuck," Will whimpers, "fuck, fuck, oh--" he feels close to tears and really hopes he doesn't weird his companions out, hauling in a huge, shaking breath and then biting his hand to keep back a howl as Hannibal grinds even deeper.

He whines some garbled apology that he can't last, and then he's coming, making weird sobbing noises with his face hidden between Bedelia's breasts. It takes him a long time to stop shaking, and they wait for him, Bedelia stroking his hair and Hannibal kissing the back of his neck.

"Sweet boy," Hannibal purrs, and kisses Will's ear before carefully sliding out of him. He's still hard and Will feels bad for leaving him hanging, but Hannibal just throws the condom away and kisses him before moving into Bedelia's open arms. Will watches them together until he slides into a doze. He'll have to get up and go home to tend the dogs and avoid explaining anything to Abigail, but for now he can just rest, rocked by the rhythm of Hannibal and Bedelia together.

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